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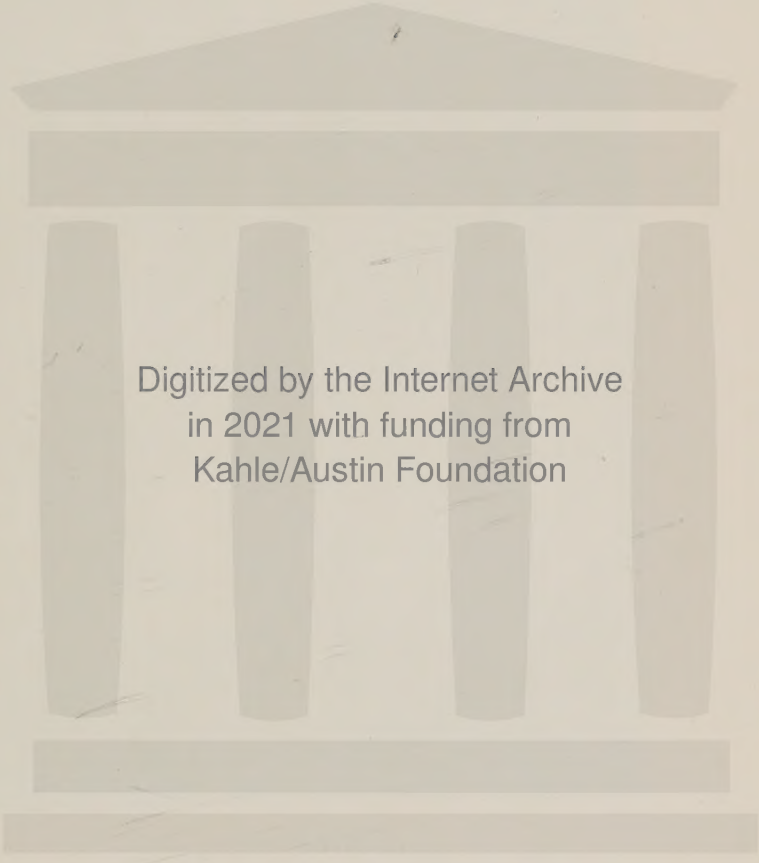
# FREDERICK THE GREAT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FREDERICK THE GREAT
by de Gasc

# FREDERICK THE GREAT

by

Margaret Goldsmith

With an Introduction by
Harold Nicolson

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to Elizabeth Sprigge

# INTRODUCTION

Carlyle, it is to be feared, is not very readable. In ten years, perhaps, he will again have recovered his public, as, indeed, he deserves. Meanwhile he enjoys immortality, and is kept alive by adventitious circumstances, such as his *Life of Sterling*, and his wife's letters, and the pathetic survivals of Cheyne Row. I question, however, whether the undergraduate of to-day would read the *French Revolution* for pleasure, or *Cromwell*, or *Frederick the Great*. Historically these tortured volumes have their value, if only because they indicate how seldom a historian can combine accuracy of fact with accuracy of presentation, and how the paradoxes of one generation become for the next and succeeding generations either aphorisms or lies. Carlyle, for this and other reasons, is, if only temporarily, misleading. He creates a tangle. He Germanises what should be English. The bees in his bonnet go buzzing after red herrings. But he was a great man, and let us hope that in 1940 this fact will again be widely recognised. Meanwhile, however, the volcano is choked by its own lava.

For to-day we repudiate the religious temperament. This may be merely a phase, but it is at least the phase which shapes our modern sensibility. Hero-worship is not to-day a state of mind which awakes any very gay response. Not, I think, that we are lacking in idealism ; merely that we have fallen into habits of more scientific thought. We also may desire that black be shown as shiningly white, but we are aware that this transmutation cannot be effected solely by deliberate forms of belief ; we know that there are grey

zones between every extreme ; we wish to be assured before we can be reassured ; we like our bits of thing. Carlyle also spent his sulky life in attacking what he regarded as cant, but the windmills at which he tilted have become for us charming features of the countryside, nor do we appreciate the corrugated iron with which he endeavoured to replace their thatch. He derided the vapid optimism of his age with courage and sometimes with good sense, but the emphasis today is thrown upon the falsity of his own formula as much as upon the falsity of the formula which he endeavoured to destroy. Which gives to his books a violent dullness, a dull violence.

Meanwhile he has rather spoiled the market for such subjects as the French Revolution and Frederick the Great. I am myself anything but a historian, but I do like to know about people who are now dead. I am not convinced that Carlyle satisfies this desire. I admit his great importance in the development of English history and biography, and I recognise that he, more than any man, introduced the idea that a narrative of people is more important, and more interesting, than a narrative of events. But with all his realism he was not a realist. He desired always to present a point of view, to create types. The central fact about interesting personalities is, however, that they depart from the typical ; it is their disintegration which is instructive, not their integration ; it is their inconsistencies which convince us more than their consistencies. I do not think—I have never thought—that Frederick can have been very like Carlyle's Frederick the Great. The latter is merely very like Carlyle. And from this curious resemblance the book derives a large portion of its value.

And yet somewhere, at some time, there really was a person who regarded himself as Frederick. A person with both an outside and an inside. A man who made wars and signed despatches, and yet a man who would wake in the dawn alone with himself inside the bedclothes, alone with the inner anxieties and squalors of our human frame. A man of certain appetites and desires. A man who liked the smell of box-hedges and disliked the sound of people rustling papers there by the fireplace when he was doing accounts. A man intimate with his own body and his own temptations. A man who knew very well that he was anything but Frederick the Great.

One gets it in another way. His belongings are preserved. There is, for instance, that library at Potsdam, that brown and rounded room at Sans Souci ; that strip of terrace walk opposite his writing-table, with the green treillage arcade above it and the green and gold treillage beyond. He could rise from his table in the alcove, take his stick from where it leant against the panelling, pass through the open French window, and step out into the sudden smell of September box, those fifty yards across and back between his study and the treillage pavilion. Greyhounds stretching themselves sleepily on the Aubusson, snapping at flies. A whiff of luncheon from the kitchen wing. The distant sound of a military band. The woods around and below him : beyond them Berlin, Brandenburg, Europe : other distant people that morning also busy with affairs of State—Catherine of Russia, Maria Theresa, Madame de Pompadour. The sound again of a military band, and a trail of smoke against the lower woods where the weeds are burning.

There exists a fascination in the accumulation in one place of the personal and everyday possessions of a famous man. You have it in Cheyne Row. You have it again in Potsdam. His chair ; his eye-bath ; his flute, stilled. The interest aroused by such objects is not necessarily vulgar. We are aware of such intimacies with an awareness which is not superficial. We are sensitive to time ; we are, as never before, sensitive to personal identity ; we are to-day all valet to our heroes. Nor is this modern aspect in itself destructive. We know that, even for the most supreme and confident genius, life and action are largely matters of intelligent improvisation ; that the quotidian is the real foreground ; and that the more we judge by the aggregate of achievement the further do we misrepresent the actual experience of the man whom we are endeavouring to portray. I do not myself believe overmuch in human foresight. I believe only in an acquired habit of mind adjusting itself intelligently or the reverse to daily circumstances. In any case, the foreshortening of biography into terms of achievement is apt to produce a distorted picture. At any given moment your hero *hoped*, but did not *know*, what he was about to achieve. The more important elements in any given experience are constituted by the things a man disliked, by the things he avoided doing. Biography in general ignores the unachieved. The perfect biography, as that of Boswell, is thus a series of given moments, and not the imaginative rendering of organic growth. It is as symbols of these given moments, and of their recurrence, that I cherish detailed possessions : the tray in which a man kept his buckles and his pins ; the knife with which he

trimmed his pens ; the view from his writing-table when he paused for a moment and looked up ; the smell of beeswax in the passage.

The everyday life of Frederick the Great thus stimulates our curiosity — the amazing contrast between the outer and the inner man ; the harsh childhood, that strangely secretive adult age. The actual material for our reconstruction is almost overwhelming. A plethora of material, ranging from State archives to his own arid poetry and his own unnatural prose ; from his snuff-boxes and walking-sticks out into the scrannel soil of Brandenburg ; from the spare silken benches on which his pages drowsed in the ante-room, to the wider combinations of that fertile and cautious mind. His strange ill-written letters, for instance, to his factotum Fredersdorf. I quote at random :

" *31 märz, 1754.*

"mit der Casparini volen wihr auf 2 jahr Capituliren. vieleicht thuet sie es auch wohlfeiller, wir müssen sie wohl behalten, denn eine bessere ist jetzunder nicht. Carel hat heute einen jungen hasen gebracht. er Saget, man hette ihm ins Nest gefunden. nehme Dihr hübsch in acht ! gottbeuahre !

" Frch."

Surely such a letter to his butler, and in such bad German, is odd indeed. A meticulous and a querulous mind. A kindly tease at moments and at moments an ill-tempered cad. A personality, in any case, the essence of which it is difficult to convey.

A warped nature : that is generally admitted. A nature which it is useless to interpret in terms of its own success, but which can be understood only in

terms of its own sufferings and failures—in terms, that is, not of its achievements but of its repressions. But here again the biographer finds himself on thin ice. For we are bored nowadays by psycho-analysis, and we can leave it to others to discuss Frederick's inhibitions. Yet they existed, and were important. It is high time that they were stated correctly and immodestly. For it is only against the sidelight of his own aberrations that the sharp profile of Frederick's originality can be properly detached. His was an age of masterful femininity, and Frederick was absolutely of his age.

I think most people who read Miss Goldsmith's book will recognise that, while absolutely unpretentious, it is complete in itself. Her wide knowledge of German life and psychology has not obtruded itself, nor does she indulge with any amateurish gusto in the indelicacies which, in such a biography, must inevitably occur. She has written simply and straightforwardly on a subject which has tempted others to rhetoric or whitewash. Her book, in which the relation between Frederick and Frederick the Great is admirably proportioned, is far more than a readable handbook. It tells us enough, but not too much, of the outward circumstances of Frederick's life. And in dealing with his inner life it speaks openly of what the experts have for long known but have hesitated to affirm. It is thus a frank book and a convincing book. I do not think that Frederick would have himself disputed its accuracy of impression, or failed to appreciate its essential sympathy. For, although he dealt consistently in lies and mystification, yet he was ever haunted by a dull home-sickness for truth.

HAROLD NICOLSON.

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(Said to be the only portrait painted from life.)
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" Es ist doch was einziges um diesen Menschen."

(GOETHE about Frederick in a letter to Knebel written in 1788.)

" Wenn du es nicht recht anfangen wirst und alles darunter und darüber geben wird, so werde ich im Grabe über dich lachen."

(FREDERICK WILLIAM I about his son Frederick, 1734, to Baron Seckendorff.)

CHAPTER I

# MALADJUSTMENTS IN CHILDHOOD

## (1712–1728)

Frederick William, the " Great Elector " of Brandenburg-Prussia, laid the corner-stone for Prussia's future importance as a world power. He revived his country after the havoc created by the Thirty Years' War ; he expanded its territory and organised its internal administration. Under his rule the world at large began to realise the existence of this little principality ; he won a place for Brandenburg-Prussia in the councils of Europe. He paved the way for his great-grandson, Frederick, to create a great and powerful position for Prussia in the years to come. Before the Great Elector's time, furthermore, Brandenburg-Prussia had been a constitutional State, governed by the Elector and a Diet ; he changed it into an absolute monarchy. This, too, was, of course, important for Frederick the Great ; when he became King he was an absolute ruler from the start : there was no Diet to be considered.

. . . . . .

The Great Elector's son, Frederick, was not as efficient as his father. His prestige as an absolute monarch meant more to him than the performance of his functions as a ruler ; he thought that an absolute monarch should be called a " King," and not merely an " Elector." Besides, his cousin, William of Orange,

had become King of England ; Elector Frederick Augustus of Saxony was now King of Poland ; he too must become a King. Elector Frederick, therefore, concentrated his energies on realising this ambition. Finally, in 1701, he succeeded ; Emperor Leopold presented him with the title " King of Prussia." And certainly " Frederick I, King of Prussia," as he was now called, deserved this reward ; he had dutifully placed his small army at the disposal of his Emperor in the War of the Second Coalition against Louis XIV, in the Wars of the Spanish Succession, in Leopold's wars against the Turks. It was in return for all these favours that the Emperor had finally consented to make him a King. Why not ? A gracious gesture. After all, Frederick had been useful, and the traditional loyalty of the Hohenzollern family was sufficient assurance that none of them would take this new honour too seriously ; that none of them would oppose the authority of their Emperor in anything that really mattered.

Elector Frederick was elated over his new title. He loved titles ; above all, he loved the ceremony in which a King can indulge without making himself ridiculous. He went to Königsberg, the capital of the Province of Prussia, and had himself crowned with pomp. This was in January 1701. What he wanted, above all, was that, when he returned to Berlin and settled down to his kingship, his colleagues on the other thrones of Europe should realise that a full-fledged monarch had joined their ranks. So he lived in conspicuous luxury, spending far too much of little Prussia's money, hoping that the gossip about his elaborate dinner-parties would reach Versailles or St. Petersburg. As a King,

Frederick I was a parvenu ; as a man he was frivolous, although he did take a certain amount of interest in the arts and sciences.

Under his surface gaiety he was, however, worried most of the time ; the succession to the new throne had not been secured beyond the next generation. His one son, Frederick William, was married to a woman who was a disappointment for many years ; her two sons had died in infancy from unsuccessful teething. Then, in 1709, came a daughter, and it was not until 1712 that the second Frederick was born : a frail child, without much will to live. But he lived, nevertheless. Frederick William's wife, Sophie Dorothea, had done her duty. A year later, with his mind at rest, the first Frederick died. The succession in his new kingdom was secured.

. . . . . .

Frederick William, the second King of Prussia, did not resemble his father in the slightest, except that he, too, was filled with a profound loyalty and subservience to his Emperor in Vienna. His short figure was thickset and inelegant in every gesture. " Stumpy " (" Der Dicke ") his own children called him behind his back ; the " fat King of Prussia " he was called by Voltaire.

His mother, Sophie Charlotte of Hanover, a very sensitive woman of great culture, died when he was a boy. He was neither sensitive nor did he, in his childhood, absorb any of her superior mentality. At seventeen he went to Holland to fight in the War of the Spanish Succession. He revelled in the rough army life ; he felt entirely at home in the tents behind the lines, drinking with his fellow-officers and enjoying

their coarse jokes. When he came home after the war his father married him off to his first cousin, Sophie Dorothea of Hanover. He was only twenty-four when his son Frederick was born, but, like many people who never really develop beyond a certain point, he was mentally quite mature : his ideas of life, about Prussia, about the future of his son, being fixed, unchanging, and unchangeable. He had two main ideas : to build up an army and to save money. In carrying them out he used all means, and spared no one. " One must admit," Voltaire commented, " that Turkey seemed like a Republic compared with the despotism exercised by Frederick William."

He was passionately attached to his army. He judged men according to their military fitness ; they were good or bad according to their capacity or incapacity as soldiers or officers. He harboured a profound contempt for the arts and for everything he thought would diminish military efficiency. He loved his soldiers as a miser his gold. He gloated over them, he bullied them, he knew the names of the men in his crack regiments, but he cherished them too much to risk their lives on wars of his own choosing. Each regiment was an end in itself.

He was economical to the point of stinginess, except where his army was concerned. One of the first things he did when he became King was to sell most of his father's expensive furniture. When he bought a new suit of clothes, which was so seldom as to be inconsistent with cleanliness, he made the tailor use the buttons from the old suit for the new one. Why buy new buttons ? Old ones buttoned just as well. He was so stingy with his wife's household allowance

that his children usually left the table hungry or with indigestion after eating " heavy vegetables which they could not stand." When they ventured to complain, which was seldom, Frederick's younger sister usually being the one with sufficient courage, Frederick William threw plates at their heads. He wanted to save money in his household ; the food was quite good enough.

But to acquire new recruits for his " giant guards " he spent vast sums. His agents in foreign countries spent twelve million thaler bribing men to become soldiers in his army, while he, at home, grudged fifty thousand to promote education in Prussia.

Frederick William permitted himself one indulgence, one recreation—his *Tabaks Kollegium* : the evenings he spent drinking and smoking among his intimates and exchanging unsavoury gossip. Some of his friends were of the nobility, but many of them were heavy Berlin *Bürger*. Frederick William always preferred the latter ; he hated the ceremony and refinement which most of the *Junkers* had cultivated during his father's reign.

Sometimes his small son, Frederick, was ordered to appear at the *Tabaks Kollegium*, where he was the butt of his father's ridicule. Frederick William drunk was more revolting than Frederick William sober, and the room, heavy with smoke, the smell of beer, and the thick, jeering voices of the men around the table, often made the shy, sensitive child feel physically ill long after he had been allowed to return to his room. Frederick never got over his distaste for the bourgeoisie, so revolting had been his early contact with his father's friends.

Frederick William had a loud, bellowing voice. His language was at times unprintable. He was a bully, delighted in frightening people by shouting at them, but he was essentially weak and easily influenced by those who knew how to manage him. He was always under the influence of some man at his Court ; for many years his chief adviser was Baron Grumbkow, whom Frederick later called " the greatest intriguer of his time." Grumbkow acted as the intermediary between the King and his family : he conveyed little notes and messages to Frederick William from his wife when the King was in such a vile temper that she was afraid to approach him herself. Grumbkow, in turn, found it distinctly to his advantage to create friction whenever possible, thus winning favour on all sides.

Frederick William's Court—if the frugal life which he imposed on everyone in his household can be termed a Court—was a maze of political intrigues, of secret love-affairs, many of which were very unsavoury indeed, and all of which lacked charm and dignity. Prussian women of the eighteenth century were by no means the equals of their contemporaries in France. The women whom Frederick knew as a child, his mother's ladies-in-waiting, his father's mistresses, his mother herself, were none of them women whom a man would remember with admiration, or even respect, as he grew older. They were unlovely and untidy. Their minds had no shape whatsoever. It is no wonder that, even in his youth, Frederick referred to women as the sex *rempli de malice*. As children, neither Wilhelmine nor Frederick ever expected any dignity, any discretion, from the adults among whom

they lived. " Grumbkow was quite agreed that my father should have mistresses," Wilhelmine writes in her Memoirs, recalling an incident which occurred when she was but eight years old, " but he [Grumbkow] wanted to be the one to arrange these affairs." The incident which she recalls in this connection is typical of the goings-on in Frederick William's household. Frau von Wagnitz, one of Sophie Dorothea's ladies-in-waiting, was at the same time an agent of Count Rothenburg, then French Ambassador to the Prussian Court. Frau von Wagnitz's " passion for intrigue," writes Wilhelmine, " caused her to prostitute herself and her daughters to the favourites of the King. Thus she learned State secrets, which she sold to the French Ambassador." At one time Frau von Wagnitz was finding a Herr Kreutz, one of Frederick William's intimates, very useful as a source of information. Grumbkow was furious ; he was jealous of Kreutz's influence over the King. So he arranged for the kitchen boy to dress up like a ghost and haunt the palace at night. Frau von Wagnitz and Herr Kreutz were unable to keep their intrigue a secret any longer. Frederick and Wilhelmine, children though they were, knew all about this affair ; the soldiers standing guard outside their bedroom doors " were half dead with fright," and screamed with fear when they saw the " ghost " dash along the corridor. No, it was not a peaceful, harmonious household in which Frederick spent his childhood.

Besides, Frederick William was fanatically religious. God was the only creature for whom he openly admitted fear. He was most particular in performing the devotions of the Lutheran Church. He was too

fond of religion for the comfort of his family. Afternoon prayers were never omitted ; they were followed by a long, dull sermon read by the King himself. At times his religious fanaticism became acute, and it took strenuous efforts on the part of his advisers to cure him of these attacks.

He adhered strictly to his duty as he saw it. It is said that he never broke his word. This may well be true, for he was really too weak to change his mind in public. He achieved his one ambition and created a well-disciplined Prussian army. He built up the efficient Prussian bureaucracy, and maintained the power of the crown against the oligarchy of the *Junkers*. He organised the internal administration of Prussia, but did not give much thought to her international relations. Without doubt he was a good administrator, and thorough in all things. In many ways he was unquestionably an able King, but in the home he was quite impossible ; he had not a drop of human kindness and no sense of humour.

In his way, Frederick William was attached to his wife. She was very much afraid of her husband, which was a constant source of satisfaction to him. Her childhood had been miserable. Her mother, the co-respondent in one of the great scandals of the day, had been divorced by her husband, George of Hanover, who then kept her a prisoner in Schloss Ahlden, where she died thirty years after. These family troubles had made Sophie Dorothea's early training very casual. She was never taught certain important things, chief among which was discretion. Her unhappy childhood had also made her very moody. She lacked self-confidence and self-control ; when she felt inclined,

she would help her children to do forbidden things behind their father's back. In other less playful moods she immediately reported their transgressions to the King.

Many years later, Wilhelmine described Sophie Dorothea in rather a drastic manner. After dutifully mentioning her mother's " white skin " and " good and noble heart," Wilhelmine bursts out with : " Everyone has his faults, and she was not free from them. She embodied the pride and conceit of her Hanoverian family. Her ambition is without limits ; she is immeasurably jealous and suspicious, and never forgives if she thinks she has been offended in any way." These remarks from one of her children reflect her relationship with them. It is evident that she was a woman without much feeling for them. She had no gentleness. Such maternal instincts as she had were probably used up in the process of bearing children, and she seemed to have little sentiment left for the sons and daughters already born. And there were plenty of these. Throughout Frederick's childhood and adolescence his mother was for ever giving birth to more and more brothers and sisters. Altogether she had fourteen. Four died in infancy, but ten was a large family after all, even in a *gut bürgerlicher* household such as Frederick William's. In addition to Wilhelmine and Frederick there were Luise, Charlotte, Sophie, Ulrike, Amalia, August Wilhelm, Heinrich, and Ferdinand.

Frederick was indifferent to them all except Wilhelmine. Nor did his mother care for any of them, except in so far as she was aware that Frederick would one day be King of Prussia and she would be a dowager Queen. Frederick suffered all the disadvantages (and enjoyed none of the advantages) of

being an only child. Both his parents nagged at him more than at his brothers and sisters. Whatever energies were left to Sophie Dorothea, after bearing one child after another, were devoted for years to her one great ambition of a marriage between her two eldest children and the English royal house.

For Sophie Dorothea the advent of her son Frederick meant a duty finally accomplished. Officially she was pleased when he was safely brought into the world, but personally it left her strangely cold and unaffected. She almost ignored him during his childhood. He was attached to her, but in a distant, almost theoretical manner. He never hoped for any real help from her when his father bullied him. It never occurred to him to hide behind *her* skirts when Frederick William stood above them in a towering rage. It was always Wilhelmine, three years his senior, to whom he ran for comfort and protection.

Until he was seven years old Frederick was in the care of two women who had both lived at the Berlin Court for many years. His " honorary governess," Frau von Kamecke, was the wife of the King's majordomo. Her husband's dependence on Frederick William's good graces assured him that his orders regarding the child would be faultlessly observed. Frederick's other governess, Madame de Roucoulles, was actually in charge of the child, and she was a suitable tool to perform the King's wishes. A French Huguenot, Madame de Roucoulles had come to Berlin years before, and had been Frederick William's own nurse. It would never have occurred to her to oppose her former charge.

But she was an excellent nurse. She was kind ; and,

had it not been for her constant care, Frederick might well have followed the way of his elder brothers who died in infancy. Frederick was fond of this old woman, whose gentle voice soothed him after his father's outbursts. Her portrait, as an old lady, now hangs in Frederick's bedroom in the City Palace in Potsdam. No one knows whether he himself or some later Hohenzollern had it hung there.

He was exceedingly small, very frail, and acutely sensitive. He was decidedly a difficult child, usually silent and unresponsive, often sad, and apparently quite detached from his surroundings. He was shy and nervous, and jumped with fright at unexpected noises. As a child he kept aloof from his many brothers and sisters, with the exception of Wilhelmine. She, in turn, adored him, and seemed to feel his utter loneliness. " Never have brother and sister loved each other more tenderly," she wrote later. And Frederick, in a letter to her : " . . . I want no other epitaph than this : ' My sister loved me.' . . . If you consider this style too pompous, I beg your pardon. But I assure you that for this subject no style can be too solemn. . . ."

All of Wilhelmine's young maternal feelings were aroused by this fragile brother. She protected him whenever she could, though she herself suffered quite as much as he at the hands of their father. She was much concerned by his frail health ; she was always worried about him ; for, as she recalled later, he " had an exceedingly delicate constitution, and his silence as well as his lack of vitality caused considerable anxiety for his life."

During his childhood, Frederick depended on Wilhelmine for comfort and advice. She was his

bridge to reality. Her active mind often found a solution for the greatest difficulties. In emergencies Frederick admired her rare common sense, he marvelled at the way *she* kept her head while he, always so excitable, never could keep his wits about him.

Wilhelmine was later married to an insignificant and unfaithful prince, the Margrave of Bayreuth, in whose little country she had no scope for her really remarkable talents, her genius for adjusting human relationships, her interest in politics. Frederick always felt that had she been given a suitable husband the century might have heard of her. ". . . Women are not thinking creatures," he wrote to her once ; " only men have minds. . . . You, Wilhelmine, do not really belong to your sex. . . . Heaven, which gave you to your country, placed you there as an example for us all, and Europe includes you among her greatest men. . . ."

Had Frederick been left more to his sister's companionship and Madame de Roucoulles's careful supervision, he would undoubtedly have grown less morose. As it was, his father exercised a terrible domination over him. Frederick William was stubbornly determined to make his son like himself. This was difficult, for, as Voltaire says, " never perhaps in all the world have a father and a son ever existed who were quite so unlike." They had nothing in common except their ancestors. In his heart Frederick William despised anyone who was not physically robust. He could not bear to admit that he had produced a fragile son ; so he attributed Frederick's frailty to a contrary spirit.

. . . . . .

The King paid abrupt, blustering visits to the nursery, or had the child brought to his own apartments. When in a good humour, he attempted to joke with the boy, poking him roughly in the ribs, and raising his voice even above its normal pitch. The child was always horribly frightened at this performance, and when his father's temper was bad (it was more often bad than good) Frederick became hysterical with fear. He trembled, his thin little body shaking all over. His defence was always silence, whereupon his father tried to shout him into the expected response. Every meeting meant friction—terror for Frederick and intense annoyance and disgust for the King. Wilhelmine was distressed every time Frederick was summoned to their father's apartments. " The King could not bear my brother," she wrote bitterly, many years later ; " he abused him whenever he laid eyes on him, so that Frederick became obsessed with a fear of him which persisted even after he had reached the age of reason." " Oliver Twist in his workhouse and Smike in Dotheboys Hall," Macaulay comments in his Essay on Frederick the Great, " were spoiled children as compared with this unhappy heir to a throne."

Even the German language, which Frederick could never avoid entirely—for he was, after all, a German monarch—always reminded him most unpleasantly of his sessions with Frederick William. Many educated Germans of his day preferred French, but Frederick had a positive aversion to German. With Madame de Roucoulles and his sister he spoke only French, and German became associated in his mind with the distressing interviews with his father. Until his death,

Frederick felt almost a physical aversion for German. He spoke it only when he could not possibly avoid it, and then he spoke it incorrectly.

Frederick William despaired more and more of his son's character, but his determination to make a soldier of him remained unchanged. One room in the Berlin palace was turned into an armoury, and at a tender age Frederick was made familiar with the implements of war. When he was five years old a miniature cadet corps was organised for his benefit, and he was bundled into his first uniform—that of a non-commissioned officer in the Prussian army. He cried bitterly, so Wilhelmine tells us, while being dressed in these stiff clothes, but he almost smiled again when he was given a small drum to go with the outfit. On one occasion, when he tried to beat out a march, his father was so thrilled that he hastily summoned Pesne, the Court painter, to reproduce the great moment. Frederick William was tremendously excited ; he believed that at last his son had displayed a military instinct. As a matter of fact, what Frederick had expressed was a sense of rhythm. Had Frederick William realised this he would have been horrified.

. . . . . .

There were no soft and gradual processes in Frederick's education. Abruptly, on his seventh birthday, he was snatched from his female guardians and handed over to male tutors. Two of these were military : General Count von Finkenstein and Colonel von Kalkstein. These officers had sons of a convenient age, who were educated with him and became the " whipping-boys " of the Crown Prince. Finkenstein

and Kalkstein had little personal influence on Frederick. Their personalities were entirely submerged in Frederick William's orders. They were merely tools through which he disciplined his son ; tools which, he thought, would help him make a good soldier out of this weak, effeminate boy.

The King did not consider books very important, but Frederick was, of course, to be educated with German thoroughness. A young Frenchman, Jacques Egide Duhan de Jandun, was chosen by the King to supervise Frederick's " book learning." Frederick William was not subtle enough to be a good judge of character, or Duhan would have been the last man to whom he would have entrusted his son ; for Duhan loved books ; for him adventures of the mind were more important, more real, than all the military victories in the world.

Duhan was a sensitive man, and a lover of beauty, who believed in the freedom of the spirit. He had a profound knowledge of history and literature, and he was an excellent pedagogue. His was the first constructive influence in Frederick's life. The boy learned far more from him than the knowledge considered necessary for a Crown Prince of Prussia. For the first time it dawned on the boy that sensitiveness was perhaps a matter of temperament, and not intrinsically a vice or a weakness. He learned from Duhan the art of discrimination, and he began to build up a system of values, independent of his father. Frederick had the insight, even as a boy, to appreciate what Duhan was doing for him, and, when the young Frenchman was dismissed in disfavour several years later, his pupil wrote to him :

" Potsdam, *June 29, 1727.*

" I promise you, my dear Duhan, that when I have my own money I shall give you 2,400 crowns annually, and I shall love you even a little more than at this hour, if this be possible."

This promise was kept. After Duhan had been appointed and the plans for Frederick's education were settled, Frederick William sent him, for the greater part of every year, to Wüsterhausen, a royal hunting seat near Berlin, as he considered the capital too lively for a schoolboy. Finkenstein, who was in charge, received detailed instructions concerning Frederick's moral, military, and mental training. " Above all " —so Frederick William's instructions ran—" he must be so thoroughly informed as to God's omnipotence that he will always have a holy fear and veneration for his Creator." Finkenstein was ordered, furthermore, to inculcate in the boy " reverence, esteem, and obedience " towards his parents ; indeed, he received instructions to see that his pupil felt " true love and perfect confidence " towards his father. All things—so thought Frederick William of Prussia—could be achieved by the force of a military command.

The child's civilian garments were to be permanently discarded ; a uniform was the only suitable garb for a Prussian Crown Prince, who had reached the mature age of seven. It was also the royal command that Frederick's blond curls were to be removed before he left for Wüsterhausen. The barber was summoned, and the King supervised his operations with evident delight. It was all so simple : to make a man out of a child, put him in uniform and cut off his hair. For

Frederick, however, it was not so simple, as he sat, his frail, thin legs dangling from the uncomfortable chair, and felt the barber's shears cold against his neck. His eyes were hot with tears when he saw his curls, so like Wilhelmine's, dropping to the floor. Then, as always, however, he was forced to control himself, for his father, leaning on his heavy stick, was bellowing instructions at the barber.

But the barber had noticed the child's unhappy face in the mirror before them. He was far more conscious of the child's charm than of the bullying man who stood beside them. So when the King walked over to the window and, for a moment, looked at his regiments drilling outside, the barber swiftly hid at least one curl in the queue which Frederick was to wear henceforth.

. . . . . .

Frederick William's orders to Finkenstein planned every minute of his son's waking hours. His life was constant routine ; he never had a moment in which to play, to do what he chose, to think. Above all, he was never alone ; he could never satisfy his craving for solitude. There was no privacy whatsoever in his life. He was never alone, yet he was always lonely. From morning until night he was forced to express his father's personality, live the life his father had planned for him, play a rôle of his father's choosing. Many years later he expressed the misery of such an existence in a letter to Duhan : " Actually I am always the same, but I am like a mirror, forced to reflect the objects before it . . . without daring to be what I am, what nature has made me, miserably forced to adjust myself according to the objects before the mirror. . . ."

There was no flexibility in his education, except what Duhan was able to insert surreptitiously. According to his father's command, he arose every week-day at six o'clock. His " private prayers "—prescribed in detail by the King—dressing, and washing (by royal command, without soap), as well as his breakfast, were to be finished by half-past six. To save time, Frederick William had given orders that the boy was to drink his tea while his hair was being queued (by royal command, without powder).

From half-past six to seven o'clock " official " prayers were said in the presence of Duhan and the servants. During fifteen minutes of this time Duhan was instructed to read Bible selections and to lead in the singing of hymns. Thereupon the servants retired, and during the remaining quarter of an hour Duhan had orders to discuss with his pupil " important problems of Christianity." Always Frederick was grateful to Duhan for crowding discussions about music, poetry, forbidden topics generally, into these precious fifteen minutes. They read Fénelon's *Télémache* and the Greek and Roman classics, usually in French translations.

From seven o'clock until eleven Frederick had his lessons ; first two with Duhan, followed by an hour's instruction in the " Christian religion " from a Lutheran minister of the gospel. At eleven o'clock sharp, Frederick was to wash his hands again (this time, by royal command, *with* soap). He was then to put on a tail coat uniform and report to the King, whenever he was at Wüsterhausen, which, unfortunately, was very often the case. He lunched with his father at twelve o'clock, and remained with him

until two. Then followed three more hours of lessons, after which, according to the King's instructions, the boy again washed his hands. After this came physical exercises ; riding or marching with his miniature regiment. He was then allowed to rest a little, or " divert himself in some way not against God." At nine o'clock he said good night to his father. Then followed more official prayers in the presence of the servants. Then to bed ; his candle to be extinguished by half-past ten.

Sundays there was no real relief. There were not even lessons with Duhan. Frederick arose at seven instead of six, but he was obliged to attend church several times, usually with his father. When he had behaved according to instructions during the entire week, and if the King was in a relatively good humour, he had a half-holiday on Wednesday afternoons. He usually took this time to learn some Latin from Duhan, a subject his father had strictly forbidden.

This dull, but strenuous, régime continued for almost ten years, but, despite the constant strain and his physical frailty, Frederick, thanks to Duhan, remained mentally alive ; in fact, his mind actually developed under the system and grew more keen. As a very small child he had not been particularly quick. He pondered a long time before answering any question. This was probably due to nervousness and shyness rather than to any mental slowness. " He thought a long time," Wilhelmine remembers, " before he answered any question, but when he finally did reply, the answer was the right one. He learned his lessons with great difficulty, and it was generally expected that he would one day have more reason (*Verstand*) than *esprit* (*Geist*)."

Behind the King's back, Duhan gave Frederick music lessons. As long as he could remember, his mother, when she felt in the mood, had helped him to deceive his father. It had never even occurred to him that such dishonesty was wrong. Duhan bought him a flute, which he learned to play charmingly. Always, throughout his life, his flutes were his most cherished possessions. His *principessa* he called this, his first flute, declaring that he would " never love any other princess." When he was in his early teens, Duhan got for him some French clothes—soft silk robes, touching the floor like women's dresses. His greatest delight was to wear them and try to forget his stiff Prussian uniform. Sometimes, when playing the flute in such comfort, he imagined himself to be a real musician instead of a future King of Prussia. But these pleasures were very rare. He only dared risk them when his father was not in Wüsterhausen.

While Frederick was being exposed to his military education, Sophie Dorothea was assiduously intriguing to arrange the double marriage between Prussia and England. In the meantime, her father, George of Hanover, had become King of England. She had chosen her nephew, the eldest son of the Prince of Wales, for Wilhelmine. Frederick was to marry the Princess Amalia of England. Sophie Dorothea nagged at Frederick William until he, too, was interested in these plans, but for many years they were vague and indefinite. When Wilhelmine was quite small, her mother had the habit of reprimanding her with, " Those are manners of which my nephew would not approve. You must act according to *his* tastes."

FREDERICK (*aged* 3) AND HIS SISTER WILHELMINE (*aged* 5)
by Pesne

The double marriage was first officially discussed in 1723, when King George the First was in Berlin visiting his daughter. George, of course, was interested in such a union between his family and the Hohenzollerns ; Frederick William's army, as a protection for Hanover, was an asset not to be refused lightly. The prestige of both Prussia and England, united by such a marriage, would have been increased in the eyes of England's Continental rivals, France, Russia, and Austria ! Yes, George looked his daughter's children over carefully when he came to Berlin on this visit in 1723. Wilhelmine was an attractive girl, and her brother, she remembers, " was the most charming prince one could possibly imagine, beautiful to look upon and well built, with intelligence far beyond his years and endowed with every gift which marks a perfect ruler." George knew that he would need the consent of Parliament for the marriage, and he had no intention of committing himself then and there. On the other hand, he wanted to keep peace in his family, so he tentatively agreed with his daughter's plans, and assured her that he would lay the matter before Parliament as soon as he returned to London. He also emphasised the extreme youth of those concerned, vaguely suggesting that there was plenty of time. Sophie Dorothea could do nothing more, but she chafed under her father's half-hearted response.

In the meantime no one was more eager than George to foster good feeling between the two countries. He instructed the English gentlemen who accompanied him to be particularly pleasant. They put themselves out to be polite to little Wilhelmine, who was, however, too shrewd to be much impressed.

Wilhelmine remembered this visit well. She was quite evidently pleased with her own manners towards her grandfather and his suite. She was a success. " They praised me to my mother," she writes, " they told her that I looked English, and as though I had been born, one day, to be their Queen. This is saying a good deal, for the English consider themselves the greatest nation on earth, and, for them, it is the highest praise to say that someone might pass for an Englishwoman."

At first Frederick William's interest in the marriage plan was negative—that is, he made no serious objections—but gradually Sophie Dorothea persuaded him that such a union would be a gain to Prussia.

In 1725 he had signed a treaty with France and England, which was to counterbalance a secret agreement between Austria and Spain, concluded previously. Austria looked with distrust on this alliance between Prussia and England, and was afraid of a marriage between the royal houses. The Austrian Emperor, Charles VI, felt that his father, Leopold, had made a mistake. He began to be vaguely uneasy about little Prussia. Had Prussia not been a kingdom, England would hardly have considered such a marriage at all. As it was, Charles resolved to do everything he could to prevent it. This was not really so difficult, for Grumbkow was easily bribed by Austria to influence Frederick William against the plan, and another able intriguer, Count Seckendorff, was sent to Berlin as Austrian Ambassador. Seckendorff and Grumbkow played on the King's vanity, always easily aroused. He was beginning to feel piqued, in any case, by England's apparent delay. Eventually the two

made him feel that George was only playing with him. After all, his family only showed two generations of Kings, so that he was naturally sensitive about his " royal honour."

In the end he was influenced to the point of signing a treaty with Austria. Charles promised to protect Prussia's right of possession to the little Duchy of Jülich-Berg. Frederick William in turn vowed that he would acknowledge Charles's unprecedented " Doctrine of Pragmatic Sanction," according to which Prussia was to recognise his female descendants as Empresses of Germany, should Charles die without a son. This treaty with Austria, of course, was not directly anti-British, but at least it was dangerously near to being so, and Seckendorff, quite satisfied with this success, remained in Berlin to intrigue specifically against the marriage.

His activities caused much ill feeling in Berlin, especially among the Queen's friends. Some of the people at Court were " for the Queen " and the English marriage, while others were " for the King " and the Austrian faction. Intrigue followed intrigue, and both factions gossiped over all personal scandals ever rumoured about the other. It is no wonder that, in later years, Frederick lived as a recluse, this period of petty intrigues having made him lose all desire for Court life. In the end the atmosphere affected even Frederick William's nerves. With him, extreme nervousness, no longer satisfied by brutalising his surroundings, often found expression in his periods of religious fervour. This time his attack was so serious that his friends at Court became very much alarmed. He dismissed professors whom he considered

" un-Christian " from the University of Berlin ; " worldly " pleasures, such as hunting, which he passionately loved, were abandoned. His beloved *Tabaks Kollegium* was temporarily dissolved. Only biblical conversations were allowed at the dinner table ; the King prayed even more than usual. Finally his fervour became so burning that he talked about surrendering Prussia to Frederick, while he, as ex-King, would retire to the simple life on a farm, where his wife and daughters were to perform all the menial tasks for him.

The friction at Court was forgotten in a united alarm at such a prospect. Seckendorff and Grumbkow made every possible effort to revive the King. All kinds of diversions were planned, in the hope of directing his interest into other and more secular channels. Finally Grumbkow had the brilliant idea of suggesting a complete change of scene. He urged Frederick William to visit Augustus the Strong, King of Saxony and Poland, who lived in Dresden. No Court on the Continent was more worldly than this one, though Frederick William was apparently unaware of the fact. At any rate, this visit appealed to him at once ; he thought of some business he could arrange with Augustus, and his religious ardour was almost forgotten. Always he liked to combine business with pleasure.

Frederick wanted to go with the King. He was willing to bear even his father's company in order to get away from the dull life at home. But Frederick William flatly refused to take him, and left for Dresden. Frederick, of course, confided his desire to Wilhelmine, who finally, with her usual tact, arranged for him to

go. She persuaded Herr von Suhm, the Saxon Minister in Berlin, to write to Augustus, suggesting that Frederick should follow his father. Frederick William could not very well refuse this request when it came to him directly from the King of Saxony, and Frederick was sent for. He left Berlin in high spirits. He had never before taken so long a journey, and for the first time he was free from the grinding routine of his daily life at home. This was in January 1728, when he was sixteen years old.

CHAPTER II

# REVOLT

## (1728–1730)

Frederick's adolescence was full of intense and unhappy emotional experiences. Only during this period was he attracted by women. All his intimate associations with them were crowded into the weeks he spent in Dresden and the months immediately following. None of these slight adventures made any real impression on him. " I love the fair sex," he wrote quite frankly, " but my love is unstable. I want only to enjoy women. . . . I despise them afterwards."

At the Court of Augustus there was plenty of opportunity for philandering. The King of Saxony was not only a good politician, he was an equally successful gallant. Wilhelmine, in her vivid, somewhat naïve manner, describes Augustus's Court in Dresden. " It was, at the time of my brother's visit," she writes, " the most brilliant Court in Germany. Sumptuousness and pomp were at their height, all kinds of passions were indulged in at this Court, which, rightly, was compared with the island of Cytherea. The ladies were very obliging and the gentlemen very gallant. The King maintained a kind of seraglio, consisting of the most beautiful women in his country. When he died, the number of his children by his mistresses was estimated at 354. The whole Court followed his example ; one thought only of living well, and Bacchus and Venus were the ruling

gods. Here the King of Prussia soon forgot his hypocritical piety. The extravagant banquets and the Hungarian wine put him in a good humour. He formed a great friendship with the King of Poland, whose gracious manner pleased him. Grumbkow, who never forgot his secret aims, even amidst all this gaiety, wanted to exploit the King's good humour by tempting him to have mistresses." . . . Grumbkow, aided by Augustus, whom Frederick William's blustering vulgarity amused, succeeded in this plan.

At that time Augustus the Strong was fifty-eight years old, and at the height of his powers. Young Frederick was amazed at the life in Dresden. He had not known that a Court could be as gay as this one. At home he had worked all day and slept at night. In Dresden he played all night, slept most of the day, and never worked at all. He had never dreamed of such extravagance. In Berlin he was accustomed to have one candle so that he would not stumble in the dark. In Dresden, so many candles were lighted in the evening that the rooms in the palace were brilliant. He observed with astonishment that clothes were not used merely to keep warm and hide one's nakedness, but that people chose them with care, to enhance their charm.

It amused Augustus to observe the youth's surprise at his new environment ; he was glad to aid Grumbkow in keeping Frederick William fully occupied, so that Frederick was relatively free from paternal supervision. Frederick made a tremendous effort to appear accustomed to the gay life. He always loved to dramatise himself. He now assumed the attitude of a sophisticated prince, and played his part well. Even in

his letters to Wilhelmine, who knew him too intimately to be in the least impressed by his grown-up manner, he played this part, though towards her he remained a little self-conscious. One of these letters still exists:

" Dresden, *January 26, 1728.*

" Dearest Sister,—In spite of so many diversions, I think of you constantly and shall not forget you until I die. But wait a moment. First let me cough, spit, and then blow my nose. What do you want to hear about? The great world? *Bon.* The King of Poland is of average height. He has very heavy eyebrows and a slight pug-nose. He walks well, despite his lameness. He has *esprit,* is polite toward everybody, and has considerable urbanity. He has quite a twang in his speech, and is, therefore, difficult to understand, particularly as he has lost so many teeth. Nevertheless, his appearance is good and he is physically agile; he dances and does other things, just like a young man.

" The Crown Prince resembles the Markgraf Ludwig, is about as tall as Grumbkow, but much stronger. He wears a blond wig and a different suit of clothes every day. But he is a handsome prince. To my intense surprise, I find him of great *esprit,* for he talks well and everything he says has hands and feet. In brief, he is very pleasant. The princess is anything but pretty; to be quite frank, she is homely, but kind-hearted, though somewhat uppish. In common with all mediocre minds, she likes the Court fools. She puts on airs with dresses and jewels. She owns four sets of jewellery, one more handsome than the other. I was especially struck

by her ear-rings ; they are oval in shape, and set with diamonds, and longer than any I have ever seen. All her ladies-in-waiting wear Spanish costumes. The Princess of Weisenfels, affectation personified, is always with her.

" Following is the family tree of the recognised bastards of the King :

" *Children of Madame Spiegel*[1] : Count Rutowski and two brothers.

" *Children of Countess Königsmark*[2] : Moritz, Count of Saxony.

" *Children of Countess Cosel*[3] : Countess Friesen and Countess Cosel.

" *Children of a French lady*[4] : Countess Orczelska.

" These are the most select ladies at the Court.

" By the way, I showed your letter to the Field-marshalin. She places herself at your feet. Her sister, Countess Branicki, arrives here to-day. Count Poniatowski is one of the nicest men at the Court. Some news : The King has taken on Count Rutowski as a major-general in his service.

" I have been heard as a musician. Richter, Buffardin, Quantz, Pisendel, and Weiss played too. I admire them. They are the best artists at the

[1] A Turkish lady called Fatima, who was taken prisoner in the Turkish War of 1686 and given the name of Maria Aurora. She was later married to a gentleman-in-waiting of Augustus, one General Spiegel .

[2] Countess Maria Aurora Königsmark came to the Saxon Court in 1694. When she was older, in 1728, she became the Mother Superior of the Convent for Virgins at Halberstadt.

[3] Originally Anna Konstanze von Brockdorf, then married to a Saxon Minister, Count Hoym, later divorced from him to become a mistress of Augustus, with the title Federal Countess (Reichsgräfin) Cosel. In 1716 she had a disagreement with him, which resulted in her imprisonment for life.

[4] This French lady was Henriette Renard, who owned a wine restaurant in Warsaw. She realised her high aspirations and married one Prince Karl Ludwig of Holstein-Beck.

Court. Another time I shall write you about the Dutch and Basque house, and if you are good I shall bring you a present when I come home. To-day ' Tartuffe ' is being played. I am about to go. Farewell. Love me, as I love you. If your ears are not ringing, it is not my fault, for the Field-marshalin and I talk of you constantly. I love you so much, that I would gladly surrender my place to you, so as to please you.

" Farewell, I am your servant. Madame de Mesnil, Monsieur Dupré, Favier, Saint-Denis, Beaufort, and Mesdemoiselles Clement, Vaurinville, Correte, Romainville, and other dancers, danseuses, and actors of various kinds are calling me.

" FREDERICK THE PHILOSOPHER."

According to contemporary records, Augustus had so many children he could not possibly care for them all. But he was so deeply moved by the charms of the Countess Orczelska, whom Frederick mentions, that he acknowledged her officially as his daughter ; he was indeed passionately devoted to her. Frederick, too, was much attracted by this lady. She was several years his senior, and a woman of vast experience. She was not beautiful, but well built, and knew how to make the most of her looks. She loved to wear men's clothes, and frequently masqueraded as a page. Frederick was always particularly delighted with her in this costume.

Augustus was pleased with the way his young visitor enjoyed himself, but he did not like the attentions he paid to the fair Orczelska. He decided to direct his interest to another favourite, and arranged

for him to meet Formera at a fancy dress ball. Little is known of her costume on this occasion, but apparently Frederick William disapproved, for after one glimpse of the lady he hurriedly covered his son's face with his hat. But he was not quite quick enough, for Frederick saw and—later—conquered.

It irritated Frederick William beyond words to watch his son enjoying life at Augustus's Court, but he could not openly object without offending his host, and this he did not wish to do, for he was negotiating a political agreement with him, which was finally settled, much to Augustus's advantage. Frederick William promised to help him should Poland contest his right to her throne. He also made Augustus a loan amounting to four million thaler. All Frederick William got out of the arrangement was the province of Lausitz, which he received as security for the loan, but he was so pleased to expand Prussia without sacrificing any of his beloved soldiers that he was quite satisfied. Besides, it appeased his conscience to have concluded some business in Dresden. After all, an agreement was an agreement, and he could tell Sophie Dorothea about it when he got back to Berlin.

. . . . . .

After their return, Frederick's life became intolerable. The renewed monotony and discipline were more irksome than ever ; moreover, the gay life and sleepless nights in Dresden had told on his nerves. He was utterly depressed, and mentally and physically exhausted. He lost weight so rapidly after his return that the King was finally notified, and the Court physician pronounced his illness as a " lingering fever " that threatened tuberculosis. As a result,

Frederick was temporarily relieved of some of his most arduous military duties, but this did not make his life as a whole any easier. Frederick William, always enraged by the poor health of others, bullied his son more than ever, and nagged at him on all occasions. The antagonism between them was growing more and more acute.

Frederick's one diversion, that early spring of 1728, was to dream of his days in Dresden and to steal off secretly from the dreary City Palace in Potsdam, where his parents lived, to play his flute to a young woman living in the town. His biographers have made this little affair seem more important than it really was. Voltaire's account is probably the most trustworthy. " The Prince," he wrote, " had a kind of mistress (*une espèce de maitresse*), the daughter of a school-teacher in Potsdam. She played the spinet badly, and the royal Prince accompanied her on his flute. He thought that he was in love with her, but he was mistaken. His predilection was not for her sex. Nevertheless, as he had pretended to love her, his father made the young lady walk around the marketplace in Potsdam, led by an executioner who whipped her—right under the eyes of his son."

Trying to forget this dreadful scene, Frederick again stayed at home in his father's dreary palace. He concentrated his mind on the freedom he had enjoyed, for so short a time, in Dresden. He forgot Formera, and worked himself up into a passion for the Countess Orczelska. This was not inopportune, for in May 1728 she came to Berlin with Augustus, who was promptly returning his visit from the Prussian Court. Wilhelmine recalls with satisfaction that the

Countess was most gracious towards her brother while she was in Berlin, and that she granted him any number of "very private interviews." Whether or not she was dressed as a page for these meetings is not known. Wilhelmine observed with satisfaction that the Countess's visit had a splendid effect on Frederick's health.

He avoided the other Saxon visitors assiduously. One evening, when a large official dinner was to be given in their honour, he pretended to be ill so that he would not have to go. Wilhelmine, who could not get out of going to the banquet, was annoyed with him. She believed that he did not come because his vanity was pricked at the thought of the Saxon Crown Prince "out-ranking" him at the dinner-table. But this is not likely, for, even as he grew older and more egotistical, Frederick was an egoist without vanity. Besides, his early training had left him few illusions concerning the social position or the importance of a Prussian Crown Prince. It is more probable that official dinners, especially at his father's table, simply bored and revolted him. He hated noisy crowds of people.

Augustus's visit meant a temporary relief for Frederick and interrupted his daily routine, but after the Countess and the other guests had gone his life was even harder than it had been before. It seemed, at times, as though he could no longer bear Frederick William's tyranny with his old stoicism. "A father who is one's enemy is the worst thing on earth," he wrote. Also he was beginning to hate himself for not revolting openly against his father's bullying.

He found some consolation in a friendship with

one of his father's pages, Keith, who became his inseparable companion. Wilhelmine thoroughly disapproved of this friendship. She remonstrated with her brother again and again, trying to persuade him that " such intimacy was not proper." Frederick tried to placate his sister by assuring her that Keith was useful to them both, because in the King's apartments he often heard gossip that would help them to deal with their father. But she was not convinced. In spite of her warning, Frederick was so indiscreet that rumours of his attachment finally reached the King. Such affairs were by no means uncommon in the century of Louis XV, but they were decidedly out of place at the Court of Frederick William, where the ideal of the ultra-masculine prevailed. The King's contempt for Frederick became even greater and more articulate.

Keith was immediately dismissed from the King's personal service and transferred to an unpopular regiment stationed in Wesel, near the Dutch frontier. Frederick was temporarily sent to Wüsterhausen and commanded to repent of his sin. At this safe distance he tried to soften his father's wrath. His terror of his father, his desire for peace at any price, was far greater than his pride and his sincerity.

" My dear Papa," he wrote in September 1728, in faulty German, " I have not been able to make up my mind to come to my dear Papa, partly because I have been advised against it, but chiefly because I might expect an even worse reception than usual ; and because I am afraid of annoying my dear Papa with the following requests, I prefer to make them in writing. I, therefore, beg my dear Papa to be gracious with me, and I can assure him in this connection that, after

careful thought, my conscience finds nothing with which I can reproach myself, but should I have done anything without my knowledge or intention which might have annoyed my dear Papa, I hereby most respectfully ask his pardon, and I hope that my dear Papa may get over his cruel hate, of which I have been sufficiently aware from all his actions ; otherwise I could hardly bear it. I have always thought I had a gracious father and I should then be forced to admit the contrary. I therefore summon the greatest confidence, and I hope that my dear Papa will consider all this and will again be gracious to me ; in the meantime I assure him that my days will be filled with goodwill and that, even should he be unforgiving, I remain with humble and binding respect, his son FREDERICK."

Frederick William's answer was typical of his attitude towards Frederick. He replied in the third person, the usual form for a King to his subjects.

" . . . he is stubborn and wicked and does not love his father ; for if one loves one's father, one obeys him, not only when he is present, but even when he does not see everything. Besides, he knows that I cannot abide an effeminate creature, who has no human inclinations, who is often embarrassed, who cannot ride nor shoot and is not well washed, who wears his hair like a fool and does not have it cut off properly. I have reprimanded him for this a thousand times, but all in vain, and there is no improvement. Besides, he puts on airs, is proud, and does not speak with people unless he chooses ; he is not popular nor amiable, and makes

faces at people as though he were a fool ; he does nothing according to my will except by force ; he does nothing from love, and he has no interest in anything except to follow his own desires ; nothing does any good. This is my answer.

" FREDERICK WILLIAM."

After several weeks Frederick was allowed to come back to Berlin. Now he tried to ingratiate himself with his father : he was growing to be an expert at deception, at trickery even. No wonder that Seckendorff, writing to Vienna at this time about the future King of Prussia, says that " his greatest fault is his hypocrisy and his falseness. One must therefore exert the greatest caution before one trusts him."

Shortly after his return to Berlin, Frederick had found another intimate. This time it was Captain Hans Hermann von Katte, a young Prussian officer about six years his senior. Frederick's attachment to Keith had been a mere episode, but his friendship with Katte was not a schoolboy's passing fancy ; it was deep love and friendship.

Katte was the son of a general in Frederick William's army. His ancestors had been Prussian officers for generations, but the military life had never appealed to him. Even Wilhelmine, who disliked him because she was afraid of the disaster which this friendship might mean for her brother, had to admit that Katte was " well read, intelligent, and that he had *savoir faire*." He had studied law in Berlin and had travelled all over Europe, but in the end he had been forced into the army ; for one of his class in Prussia there was no future in any but a military career. He would have

preferred the life of a scholar, but he was not strong enough to oppose so radically the traditions of his family. Katte was widely read and very well informed for a man of his age and class. He was witty and entertaining. He stimulated Frederick's imagination. He was not good-looking—his heavy eyebrows met over the bridge of a large nose, and he was badly pock-marked—but his great charm of manner apparently caused people to forget his unattractive face.

Katte, in turn, was devoted to Frederick. Although the young officer had abandoned all hope of any other life, he still rebelled inwardly against the army. It gave him tremendous satisfaction to encourage Frederick's revolt against his father's régime. This hopeless rebellion against the Prussian military system was the chief bond between the two. They had a hate in common : Frederick's father and all he stood for.

Katte helped Frederick to continue his non-military interests in many ways. He smuggled forbidden books into the Prince's apartments, and secretly arranged flute lessons at regular intervals. During these lessons the faithful Katte always kept watch outside Frederick's door, and warned him if he heard the unexpected approach of Frederick William.

Frederick's allowance was so small that he could afford neither books nor lessons in flute-playing. Katte seemed to know everyone in Berlin, and he easily arranged loans with a number of wealthy merchants. At this time Frederick borrowed seven thousand thaler from the firm of Splitgerber und Daum, the largest banking house in Berlin. He was able to store the books —Voltaire, Descartes, Locke—which he bought at this time in the home of a Berlin merchant. It would

not have been safe to hide them anywhere in the paternal palaces at Berlin or Potsdam. Frederick William's eyes were as sharp as they were suspicious.

. . . . . .

Frederick's mother was still devoting all her energies to the English marriage. His father, on the other hand, was growing more and more disgusted with the idea. He had hoped that George II, who ascended the throne in 1727, would finally force Parliament to a decision. But George was having his own troubles at home with the Whigs, Walpole, and the Excise Bill.

Frederick William did not like his wife's relatives in England. Perhaps he and the second George were too alike, temperamentally, to appreciate each other. " The temper of the second [George]," writes John Richard Green in his *History of the English People*, " was that of a drill-sergeant, who believed himself master of his realm while he repeated the lessons he had learnt from his wife and which his wife had learnt from the Minister." Frederick William now became irritable every time the English marriage was mentioned. He was already considering other candidates for his daughter's hand and heart. One of these, a Duke of Weisenfels, a most unattractive person, was invited to discuss the matter with him in Berlin.

Sophie Dorothea was so upset by the prospect of a marriage between Wilhelmine and Weisenfels that she turned her back on the Duke when Frederick William tried to present him to her and Wilhelmine. Thereupon Weisenfels left the Queen's apartments in great embarrassment, but, instead of regretting her rudeness, Sophie Dorothea showered tearful reproaches upon her husband. She made such a scene that even

Frederick William was finally exhausted ; he promised to make a final effort to arrange Wilhelmine's marriage with the Prince of Wales. He emphatically refused, however, to arrange a union between Frederick and Princess Amalia.

Wilhelmine, who had witnessed this scene between her parents, never forgot her father's bitter remarks nor her mother's hysterical outburst. " Do not think," he said to his wife, " that I shall marry your failure of a son to an English princess. I do not want an opinionated daughter-in-law here at the Court, intriguing the way you do, madam. I shall give your good-for-nothing son a whipping before I will give him a wife."

When Frederick heard about this conversation from his sister he was desperate. A union with England had seemed the only way out of his unbearable situation. In any case, it would have meant a journey to London and a few months' rest from his father. Besides, a connection with the English royal house promised a certain independence from the King of Prussia. Frederick now bitterly abandoned all hope for his own marriage, but he realised that Wilhelmine's union with the Prince of Wales would indirectly help him. He knew that, if she became the Princess of Wales, she would be able to do a great deal for him. He decided, therefore, to risk everything in helping her, and without the King's consent—so Wilhelmine records—he and his mother both wrote to England directly. These secret letters brought the most favourable results. George II had not succeeded in winning Parliament's approval, but he wrote that he was privately interested in a union with Prussia, and decided to allow the Prince of Wales to travel to Berlin

" incognito, and without the consent of his father," to consummate the marriage. Parliament would then be faced with the alternative of recognising this union or creating serious friction with Prussia. The latter course seemed out of the question.

One day a letter from the Prince of Wales announced his arrival in Hanover. Everything seemed finally settled. It was only a question of weeks before Wilhelmine's wedding. Frederick William ungraciously grunted his satisfaction, and Sophie Dorothea was beside herself with joy. Wilhelmine, too, was pleased, though she was now faced with the actual prospect of a husband whom she had never seen, and this prospect did not please her. Frederick was much relieved. There seemed nothing, barring accidents, which could now intervene. But the unexpected happened. Sophie Dorothea's indiscretion proved even greater than her ambition.

She struggled all day to keep the great news to herself, and by evening she could bear it no longer. " Her ill-fated star decreed," writes Wilhelmine, " that the British Ambassador called upon her. As usual, he told the Queen what news he had received from London ; thus they began to talk, and the Queen, forgetting all of her promises, told him about the Prince of Wales's plan. . . . The British Ambassador shrugged his shoulders. . . . ' How unhappy I am,' he said, ' that your Majesty has told me something which should have been kept a secret from me as much as from Herr von Seckendorff. My God, how unfortunate I am, to be obliged to send a courier to England this evening, to inform my King of his son's plans, which he will prevent him from carrying out."

If Sophie Dorothea had been more discreet or the British Ambassador less conscientious, European history during the next fifty years might have taken a very different course. As it was, the Prince of Wales was summoned back to England, and Sophie Dorothea's hopes were shattered for ever.

Frederick was desolate. His last hope of freedom had vanished. The irony and self-mockery he assumed could not hide his bitter disappointment from Wilhelmine and Katte. It was the irony of fate that just at this time Frederick William heard about Frederick's debts. Next to deserting from the army, the King considered this the greatest possible crime. More and more he believed his son a complete failure ; his contempt for Frederick was getting beyond his physical control. His hatred for the youth was becoming his predominant passion. Whenever he saw Frederick he wanted to strike him ; often he did strike him. The boy was slight and small-boned and not nearly so strong as his father, and this physical weakness and lack of resistance at times irritated the King almost to a point of frenzy, stimulating all the sadism there was in him.

Frederick's life became a never-ending nightmare. " All day long," Wilhelmine writes, " there was friction and annoyance. The King let my brother and me almost die of hunger. He carved the meat at table, serving everyone but us two. And if by chance anything was left in the platter, he spat into it, so as to spoil the food for us. . . ."

Frederick began to consider running away, giving up his future throne—anything and everything, only to get away. He realised that an unsuccessful flight might mean death, for this would be considered as

desertion from the army. He knew also that in his hatred Frederick William would make every effort to have him caught. Frederick discussed a possible flight with Wilhelmine. It was a comfort to feel that Katte would follow him to the ends of the earth, and he knew that Keith, too, would do what he could. Wilhelmine was entirely in sympathy with her brother, though she dreaded giving him up. As always, however, she thought things out clearly and saw the practical difficulties ahead.

For some weeks she successfully dissuaded him from running away, but one day the inevitable crisis with his father arrived. He had entered the King's apartments, nervous and uncertain as usual, and Frederick William's control completely left him. He lunged forward and knocked his son to the ground, and then beat him with all the brutal strength of his two fists. The hatred of years seemed to burst forth, and he called his son every obscene name in the German language. At last Frederick's screams brought the King's valet, who dragged him away from his father ; but, bruised as he was, Frederick's spirit was roused for the final breach, and his mind was made up to leave home at any cost.

The next day he began to plan the details of his flight. A favourable opportunity seemed at hand. The King was arranging a journey through Southern and Western Germany, and Frederick was commanded to accompany his father. The itinerary was to include Ansbach, Augsburg, Ludwigsburg, Mannheim, via Sinzheim, thence to Frankfurt, and from there by a Rhine vessel to Wesel. Frederick planned to make his flight on this journey and then go to

London. Katte stayed in Berlin for the time being, but he had obtained leave of absence and was going to England to prepare George for the arrival of his nephew. Keith was to run away from Wesel and meet Frederick in the Hague.

The logical place for Frederick's flight was at Wesel, which is near the Dutch frontier. Katte strongly urged this procedure ; an attempt to desert the royal party earlier would have been madness ; but Frederick was so much excited that he lost his head. After the vital decision to run away, he seemed incapable of planning the details of his flight in a rational manner. He made the fatal error of trying to get away at Sinzheim. Until they reached this town he made one blunder after another, apparently from sheer nervousness and mental uncertainty. He made the first serious mistake in Ansbach, where he asked his brother-in-law, the Markgraf of Ansbach, to lend him a large sum of money. Frederick should have known that the Markgraf would immediately tell the King of his request. Frederick William, always suspicious of his son, consequently had him spied upon after they left Ansbach. This vigilance made Frederick more determined than ever to run away before they reached Wesel. He wrote to Katte of his final decision, but forgot to address the letter to " Berlin." It was, therefore, delivered to an older and better-known member of the Katte family, who lived at Erlangen. This error of Frederick's eventually cost Katte his life.

One of the King's officers, his valet, and Frederick spent the night in a barn. Frederick had informed young Keith, a brother of his friend, who was travelling with them, that he wanted a horse to ride out on

an amorous adventure. Keith was to call him quietly when the horse was ready. Despite his intense excitement, Frederick slept soundly and did not hear Keith come in early the next morning. He tiptoed in, but was not sure which of the sleeping men was Frederick. The unfortunate youth by mistake awakened the King's valet. He was a sly fellow, who was trying to win Frederick William's favour, so he feigned sleep while he watched Frederick dress and slip out of the barn. He then roused the officer. They dressed quickly and followed Frederick to the market-place, where they found him about to mount the horse. Had they arrived a few moments later he would have been gone. As it was, Frederick put up a desperate fight, striking out with his fists like a man possessed, but they forced him back to the camp and into the presence of the King.

Frederick was not quite broken yet. He sullenly stuck to his tale of the amorous adventure, and Frederick William had no proof to the contrary, but thereafter Frederick was constantly watched. In Frankfurt a messenger from Katte's cousin, who forwarded Frederick's ill-fated letter, awaited the King. Frederick William was blue with rage ; his officers had to hold him for fear he would actually kill his son on the spot. This would have caused a tremendous scandal in Europe, and the prestige of everyone connected with the King of Prussia was involved. No one seemed to worry much about Frederick personally.

The party was to proceed by boat to Wesel. The King ordered Frederick to embark with the servants and soldiers on a separate vessel. Frederick William considered this a more suitable conveyance for a would-be deserter from the army than the royal boat.

During the rest of the journey Frederick was treated like a common prisoner. He was exposed to every kind of humiliation. In the meantime he was sick with anxiety about Katte. It was inevitable that Frederick William would order his arrest, and Frederick was cut off from all possibility of sending his friend a warning.

Before the King's messenger arrived in Berlin rumours of Frederick's attempted flight had already reached there. Then came a letter from the King to his wife : " I have had the scoundrel Fritz arrested," he wrote to her. " I shall treat him as his crime and his cowardice deserve. I no longer acknowledge him as my son ; he has brought disgrace on me and my house. This wretched creature no longer deserves to live." Frederick William was far too sly to mention Katte, or his part in Frederick's attempted flight ; the King wanted to catch Katte unwarned.

Undoubtedly, however, when Wilhelmine told him of this letter from her father, Katte knew that he would, inevitably, be involved ; that he would share Frederick's final punishment if he stayed in Berlin. His furlough had begun. He was free to leave Berlin at any time, but he did not go. Katte was neither a coward nor a weakling, and he loved Frederick. He could not make up his mind to let his friend face Frederick William's wrath alone. Finally, one morning the King's courier arrived in Berlin, and it was rumoured that Katte was to be arrested. He was a popular young man, and by noon some of his friends had informed him of his coming arrest. Even his colonel sympathised with Katte, and wanted to give the young officer a chance to get away. The arrest was postponed, therefore, until late in the evening. The

colonel fully expected that Katte would have left by then, but he was awaiting the officers in his rooms when they arrived.

During the day Katte had been busy. He had sent the Queen a sealed case with all his letters from Frederick, as well as copies of Frederick's secret messages to England. These documents compromised the Queen as well as Frederick, and it would have been disastrous for her if Frederick William had found them. Sophie Dorothea was in a terrible state of excitement. She knew that the first thing Frederick William would ask for upon his return to Berlin would be Katte's private papers. Wilhelmine found a way out. She broke the seal of the case and burned all the letters, but she knew that her father would be suspicious if no documents were found among Katte's belongings. An empty case would have been too compromising, so for two days and two nights the Queen and Wilhelmine wrote harmless letters and notes, imitating Frederick's handwriting as closely as possible. They put these into the case, and Wilhelmine then sealed it with one of Frederick's rings which she found among her possessions.

Except for Frederick's ill-fated letter to Katte, therefore, the King had no evidence against his son to lay before the court martial which he summoned immediately upon his return. The Court met on October 25, 1730, and declared itself " incompetent " to pass judgment on a Crown Prince of Prussia. Katte, on the other hand, had not actually deserted, but for his " disloyal intentions," exposed by Frederick's letter to him, he was dismissed from the army at once, and sentenced to three years' fortress imprisonment.

This decision of the Court left Frederick William entirely dissatisfied. He wanted to kill somebody. He claimed before the Court that Katte, as an officer in his Guard Regiment, had sworn personal allegiance to his person. Any connection with Frederick's plan, therefore, he construed as a breach of this oath. As a punishment for such disloyalty, Frederick William, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Prussian Army, on his own initiative, and contrary to the decision of the court martial, condemned Katte to death. Petitions from his family and from many other officers did not move the King. Frederick William declared stubbornly " that it is better for Katte to die than that justice should vanish from this earth."

He did not wish Frederick to escape his " just punishment " either, but his chief desire was finally to break the boy's spirit. He had coerced him, outwardly, for eighteen years, but he had never been able to master Frederick's attitude towards life.

Frederick was placed under arrest in the fortress of Küstrin, not far from Berlin. He was treated like the lowest criminal. Frederick William talked so much about condemning his son to death with Katte that the news travelled around Europe, and Austria sent an official note asking that the boy's life be spared.

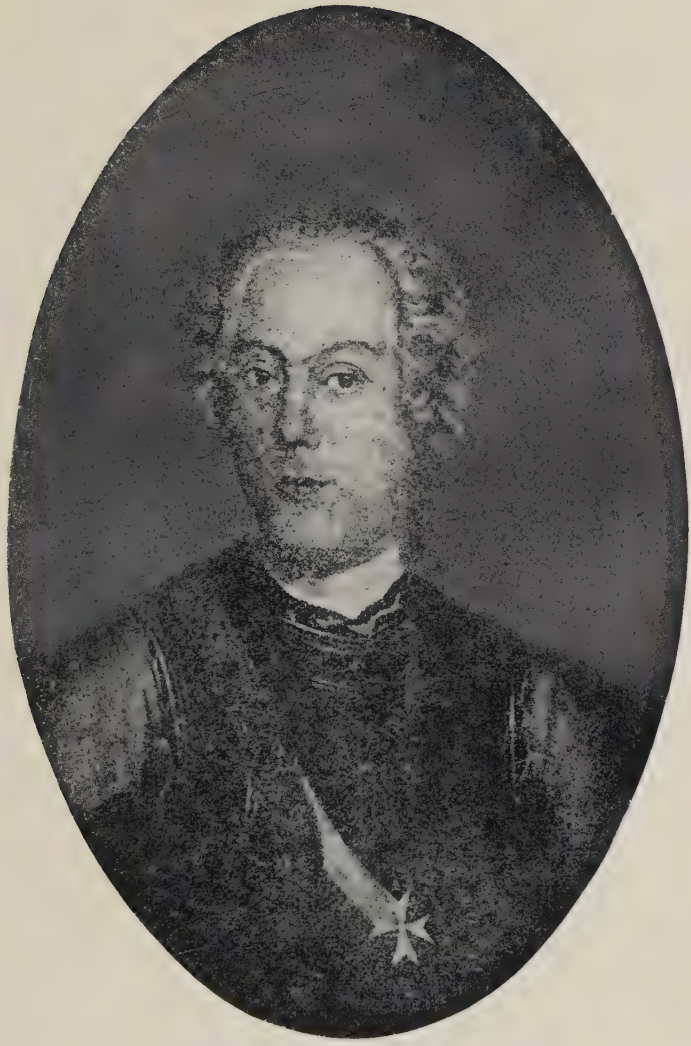
In the meantime, as he could not have Frederick at home, where he could bully him, *and* have the boy locked up in Küstrin, Frederick William let out his wrath on Wilhelmine. He accused her, too, of having had a love-affair with Katte, of being largely responsible for her brother's actions. On one occasion he " hit her in the face with his fist, so that she fell, striking her head against a sharp corner of the panelling. . . ."

At heart Frederick William did not intend to have Frederick executed. This was not what he wanted, for it would have been a frank admission of defeat. Besides, he remembered too well the unfortunate stir created twelve years before when Peter the Great had his son Alexei flogged to death. Frederick William craved to see Frederick crawl before him in the spirit; he longed to make his son apologise publicly. Messengers were sent to Küstrin regularly to ask Frederick whether he regretted his disobedience. He refused to speak to any of them. His bitterness was complete.

But even now, when he was too utterly miserable to notice anyone, to care whether his food was brought to him regularly, or who brought it, Frederick made a friend : the prison servant, who became his devoted slave. He brought the Prince food from his own kitchen at home, hiding the dishes in which he carried it under his cloak as he hurried through the town. One day he asked Frederick whether he would not like to communicate with anyone in the outside world. Lemon juice—so the prison servant said—could be used instead of ink, but it remained invisible until held over the fire. And so Frederick wrote to his sister ; the faithful servant arranged to have the messages sent to Berlin.

" To be considered an arch-heretic," he wrote to Wilhelmine, " it is necessary only not to agree in everything with one's Lord and Master. . . ."

Frederick William had not really expected that his son would surrender easily. He decided to play his last card. Katte was to be executed below Frederick's window at Küstrin, and he was to witness the death of his closest friend.



HANS HERRMANN VON KATTE

Katte, alone in his cell, not far from Frederick's, hoped for many weeks that his life would be spared. All the time he thought more of Frederick than he did of himself. When, on November 2, four days before his death, he was officially informed that he was to be executed, he wrote the following letter to his grandfather, the General :

" Greatly Honoured Grandfather,—I cannot express to you with what pain and in what agitation I write this letter. I, who was the object of all your care, and whom you had chosen to be the moral support of the family ; I, whom you brought up to be useful to his fellow-men and to his profession ; I, who never parted from you without your kindness and your good counsel ; I, who was to be the joy and comfort of your old age, must now become the object of your grief and your despair. Instead of giving you pleasure with good news, I must inform you of my death-sentence. Do not grieve too much about my sad fate ; one must accept the will of destiny when she tries us ; this same destiny gives us the strength to bear our fate with courage. . . ."

No, Katte was no coward and no weakling. On the day of his execution he said to Major Schenk, who, much against his will, was ordered by Frederick William to take charge of the execution, " I die for a Prince whom I love, and I comfort myself with the thought that my death will be the greatest possible proof of my devotion to him." Wilhelmine, usually so ready with sarcasm, has nothing to say about Katte's last talk with Schenk. She simply records what he

told her, word for word. Clearly there was nothing for her to add.

It was part of Frederick William's plan to surprise Frederick with Katte's death, to give him a shock, as well as the agony over his friend's execution. Early on November 6, four soldiers appeared in Frederick's cell, with orders that he was to look out of the small, barred window. By royal command the soldiers held him there, close to the window, where, unless he closed his eyes, he was forced to see it all. Below, in the courtyard, a scaffold had been erected, and soldiers were finishing the last preparations for an execution. Two ministers of the gospel were walking slowly towards the scaffold, with the prisoner between them. They passed directly under Frederick's window. When he recognised Katte, he went almost mad, and knocked his head frantically against the iron bars which separated him from his friend.

" Forgive me, my dear Katte," was all he could say again and again.

The gallant Katte, rising to this last occasion, looked up at Frederick, smiled, and said :

" Death for such a charming Prince is indeed sweet " (" *Der Tod für einen so liebenswürdigen Prinzen ist süss* ").

A few minutes later it was all over. Emotionally, Frederick had aged a hundred years. Spiritually, he was utterly broken. He fell to the stone floor of his cell in a deep faint. He was only eighteen, but he had known more suffering than many men ever experience. The future did not seem to matter. He had seen the human being who meant more to him than anyone on earth killed before his eyes. And he himself, by asking Katte to help him escape, was to blame. . . .

CHAPTER III

# RESIGNATION

## (1731–1740)

It is surprising that Frederick did not suffer a complete nervous breakdown after this experience. When he recovered consciousness he was in such a state of exhaustion that his mind refused to function, and he was almost oblivious of what had happened. Frederick William considered it his duty to send the Court physicians to Küstrin, and they were much concerned, as the boy's obvious indifference to life made his condition all the more critical.

Within a few weeks, however, the patient showed a marked improvement. He was still very weak, but it was evident that the nervous strain under which he had been suffering for years was definitely over. His terror of Frederick William, and the constant anxiety that his father might find out about his secret hopes or plans, had vanished; after Katte's death Frederick had nothing worse to fear. The execution of his friend and the failure of his own flight meant that defeat could go no farther. The revolt against his father became less articulate, but all the more bitter. He never forgave Frederick William, and, as a result, he was at war with his father's influence for ever after.

The shock of seeing Katte killed seemed to numb him, rob him of all emotions, of the capacity to feel. When, as the months passed, he recovered consciousness, emotionally speaking; when life again became

real to him, he looked at the world with the eyes of an old man. His was no longer the rebelling pessimism of youth ; he simply faced the fact that " there *is* no permanent and constant happiness on this earth " ; he " mocked at everything," and accepted life for the little it was worth.

Frederick's general indifference made it easier for Frederick William finally to have his own way. With the physicians, a minister of the gospel had been sent by the King to Frederick's bedside to give him the spiritual comfort which, so the King decided, his son should be wanting. This clergyman, Müller by name, was a military chaplain, and was therefore able to discuss a Prussian's duty to his King and army as well as to his God. Frederick looked respectfully at Müller as he talked. After all, nothing could compel him to listen. Every day Müller sent Frederick William a concise and military report concerning the progress of Frederick's soul. Finally, when his soul was considered sufficiently purified, Frederick was discharged from the prison and allowed to live in the town of Küstrin. With this pardon Frederick William demanded an oath from Frederick, " henceforth implicitly to obey the King " and to adhere strictly to his duty " as a servant, subject, and son of his father." Frederick signed this pledge with no articulate protest. His only hope was that his father would not live for ever, and he thought with bitter optimism of Frederick William's frequent illnesses. While actually signing the pledge, he maintained the expected filial attitude ; he wrote his father the humblest of letters. What was sincerity, anyway ? A luxury which some people might indulge

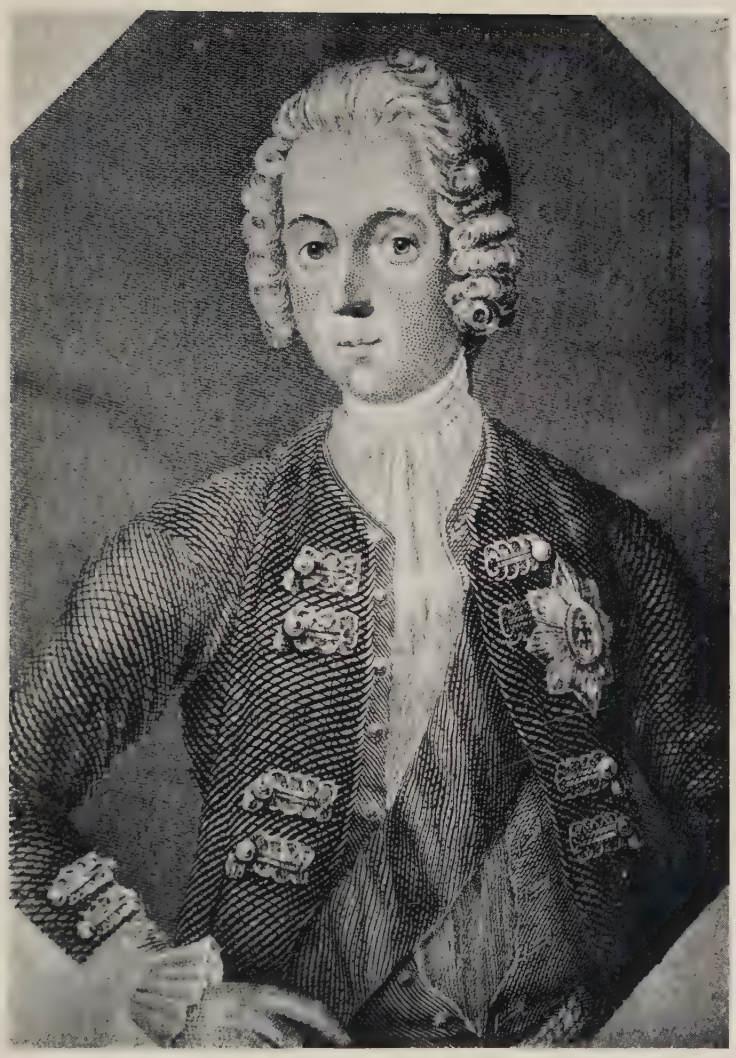
in, but not for him. He confided to Wilhelmine that " he would not have a happy day as long as the King lived," but to the King himself he was humility itself. There was no resistance left in him. " Honoured King and Father," wrote Frederick less than a month after Katte had been executed, " I appreciate with all humility the honour you confer upon me by permitting me to write to you frequently. . . ." Frederick also expresses the hope, in this letter, that his conduct will improve so as to be worthy of the King's approval ; he assures his father that he will try to improve, and hopes " that the King, who has shown himself such a just judge for so long, will again open his paternal heart to him." " Oh, what love," Frederick concludes this letter, " what loyalty will I give you. How gladly should I give my life, which is in your hands, for you. I am yours unto death. . . ." This is Frederick, one side of Frederick—the Frederick wanting peace at any price, after he had lost his friend ; the Frederick who *always* dramatised himself, became a different person whenever he took up his pen and wrote. He expressed *something* whenever he wrote ; always his style is vivid, at least in his prose, and often it is full of ideas. But it was rarely Frederick as he lived, as he really thought, who appears in his writing. Voltaire has expressed all this perfectly. " There was something in Frederick's nature," he writes, " that makes him act wholly in opposition to what he *says* and what he *writes*. This is because when he *writes* and *talks* he is stimulated by one kind of enthusiasm, and when he *acts* he is prompted by another."

Perhaps, in the case of this very humble letter to his father, it comforted him to play the part of the

obedient son—to *be* a person, in his own mind, different from the boy who had lost his friend. At any rate, it is quite clear that he had made up his mind, in his relations with his father, to avoid friction at any price. Nothing was more distasteful to him than discord, and he always shrank from scenes, especially when he did not initiate them himself. He realised that the only way to keep peace was by remaining apart as much as possible. Therefore he avoided his father henceforth, whenever he could, for, in his family, as he expressed it, "Blessed are the absent ones, for they know not what is going on."

More than anything else, Frederick craved peace. After the bitter, harassing years of his boyhood, he only wanted to be left alone. His mind, no longer obsessed with thoughts and plans of rebellion, was clamouring for creative work. He began to think and to wonder, and his unceasing curiosity, though limited always to things in which he was immediately interested, was fast becoming his chief hold on life. He refused to admit, even to himself, that human relationships were necessary to happiness. Thereafter he gratefully accepted such friendships as he found in passing, but he began to despair of finding ultimate satisfaction in anything but intellectual pursuits and constant action. There is a tradition in Potsdam that, as a small child, Frederick once said to his governess, Madame de Roucoulles : "One must love nothing too much."

In Küstrin, where Frederick remained for two years, there was ample opportunity for meditation and study. He had not been sufficiently forgiven to be allowed a uniform, or, for the time being, to leave the city. Frederick William wanted to punish his son



FREDERICK AS CROWN PRINCE

properly. Even now he knew the boy so little as to think that these orders meant a deprivation for him. Perhaps, too, he was just a little bit afraid to have his son back in Berlin so soon : a heretic at heart, no matter if he outwardly conforms, is often, in some intangible way, a disturbing element.

In Küstrin, Frederick, assigned to the Civil Service, was given a minor post in the Government of the "Neumark," a section of the Province of Brandenburg. He learned at first hand how to deal with questions of administration. Theoretical instruction in agriculture, finance, and trade had been arranged by the King. Frederick worked hard ; he was really interested. His instructors, who had understood that he was a lazy, undisciplined youth, were surprised at his keenness and ability to deal with practical problems.

Frederick had his own house and a few servants, but a very small allowance. In such emergencies he always seemed to have friends who helped him out. This time the *Junkers* of the district made regular contributions to his household budget, and a number of French refugees in Berlin sent him linen and gifts of various kinds. The thought of declining such favours never occurred to him, not because, as Crown Prince of Prussia, he considered them his due, but somehow, like many people with great personal charm, he always accepted any attentions as a matter of course.

He spent much of his leisure in Küstrin on his music ; he composed fugues, cantatas, and even attempted a symphony. He read prodigiously : Voltaire, Newton, Descartes, and again Voltaire. He began to fall into the habit of writing poetry on all possible

occasions. He went often to see the wife of his colonel, Frau von Wreech. She has caused his biographers much racking of brains. Some, who are very respectable, wanting to forget or ignore his gay life in Dresden or his friendships with Keith and with Katte, speak of Frau von Wreech as his " first love," but most of them agree that his love for the lady, who must indeed have been very charming, was purely platonic. But I have grown suspicious, sceptical, about Frederick's relations with women. His letters to Frau von Wreech —and there are several—are charming, though quite non-committal in themselves, of course. Undoubtedly he was fond of her : she appreciated his poetry ; but I have wondered whether, perhaps, he was not just as glad to be fond of her ; for, apart from the pleasure her companionship gave him, gossip about a *liaison* with a woman of her type would have been welcomed by his father. Or have I, indeed, become too sceptical ? Frederick wrote to Voltaire about this lady several years later : " A charming person . . . who inspired me with two passions at once : you will guess that one was love. The other was poetry." I do not think Frederick would have announced his passion for the lady had he really cared. Increasingly, as he grew older, he locked his real secrets away within himself. . . . There is no reference to Katte in his letters.

. . . . . .

All the time Frederick was an exile in Küstrin—for such he was considered as long as he was not officially rehabilitated in his father's army—he did not see Wilhelmine. They wrote to each other, long affectionate letters, but one feels them slightly out of touch, as though some of the spontaneity had vanished

from their relationship, as though the emotional muteness, the numbness towards everyone connected with his attempted flight and with Katte's death, had penetrated his attitude towards his sister also. He himself was fully conscious of a change. Even as a young man, though he admitted it but rarely, he was full of hard, relentless self-criticism. " I am an ignoramus," he confesses to Wilhelmine some time later, " and can claim no other merit except that I am not blind towards myself. . . ." Almost he dreaded seeing her again, when finally he was allowed to do so. This was in January 1732, at the time of Wilhelmine's marriage to the Markgraf of Bayreuth. " After the anxiety and the bitterness of such a separation," Frederick realised, " there is nothing more lovely than a reunion. There is so much to tell that one never comes to the end. But I realise, too, that at such moments there is nothing worse than to be struck dumb. One would like to say so much, and, actually, one can find nothing to say." When they did meet, at her wedding, she was deeply hurt by his reserve, his apparent coldness. Long afterwards she remembered, almost resentfully, that she ran away from her guests to have a quiet chat with her brother, " that she caressed him and assured him most tenderly of her affections, but that he remained as cold as ice and answered only in monosyllables."

Naturally she forgave this incident almost immediately. Until her death in 1758 they were devoted friends, though at times, when she tried to intrigue politically for her unworthy husband's little country, Frederick was slightly irritated. Fundamentally, however, he was deeply attached to her always. But that

close intimacy of their youth was gone. *She* had been the leader when they were children ; his mind had followed hers. Now *he* began to have a mind of his own, to want no leadership, to resent it even. " You possess so much of my mind," he wrote to her, shortly after her marriage, " that I have almost nothing left for myself."

. . . . . .

Frederick William came to Küstrin in August 1731 to see Frederick. The King saw no signs of Frederick's real interests. There were no books lying around Frederick's room. They had been hidden. Altogether the youth was most respectful ; no son could have been more obedient and devoted. Frederick William was gratified ; he felt that he had succeeded at last, and was consequently almost gracious. Frederick was allowed to leave the city and ordered to inspect the estates of the district. During the next winter the report received in Berlin concerning the Crown Prince's deportment were so satisfactory that Frederick was taken back into the fold, as it were, and appointed colonel of a regiment stationed in Ruppin, which became his official residence for the next eight years.

Now that Frederick was reinstated in the army, and again acceptable to society, Frederick William decided it was time he should marry. Seckendorff and the Austrian faction at the Court won their final victory, never forgotten or forgiven by Frederick : Princess Elisabeth Christine of Braunschweig-Bevern, a niece of the Empress of Austria, was selected as the future Crown Princess and Queen of Prussia. She was not a personality, so her tragedy has never been told. She had been neglected by nature from the first, for she

had neither beauty, intelligence, nor charm. She was eighteen years old, but mentally somewhat retarded, and altogether unattractive. Count Manteuffel, then Saxon Minister to Berlin, in his official report to Dresden gives a carefully worded description of the young lady :

> " She is blond and large enough for her age and yet well built. Her complexion is good, though somewhat pock-marked. She has blue eyes. Her disposition seems mild, and, though it is difficult to judge the character of a young girl who is still under her mother's rule, I believe that she inclines more to cheerfulness than to melancholy. It cannot be denied that she is somewhat nervous and embarrassed, but among friends she is not this way, and I do not doubt, therefore, that later, when her life is freer, she will become more forward and less constrained."

Frederick was not so tolerant after their first meeting, and described her as " neither beautiful nor ugly, not entirely without brains, but very ill-bred, shy, and without social graces." " She has an unpleasant laugh," he wrote to his sister, " walks like a duck, has bad teeth ; is dressed in poor taste, is nervous when talking, but almost always silent. Apart from this she has a beautiful skin, a nice figure, nice hands, blond hair, a good heart. She is not moody, but polite, but always either too courteous or not courteous enough."

His judgment of his future wife was evidently objective, for others shared his opinion. Wilhelmine, who saw Elizabeth Christine at her wedding, writes that " she was tall, but not slender ; she sticks out

her stomach, which spoils her appearance ; the intense whiteness of her skin is emphasised by the vivid colour of her cheeks ; her eyes are a very pale blue and do not show much intelligence ; her mouth is small and her features dainty, without being beautiful ; her whole head is so childish and charming that one could take it for the head of a twelve-year-old child ; her blond hair is naturally curled, but all these outward charms are ruined by her teeth, which are black and irregular. She has no manners, nor the slightest amount of bearing, and it is such an effort for her to make herself understood that one must guess what she is trying to say. This is at times very embarrassing." Nevertheless, Wilhelmine felt very sorry for poor Elisabeth Christine. " People with nice characters like hers are hard to find," Wilhelmine reminds Frederick later.

Frederick could not refuse to marry Elisabeth Christine without reviving all the friction with his father. In any case, he would probably have been defeated again in the end. But he did not grin and bear it without making every possible effort to avoid this marriage, " out of which," as he wrote to Wilhelmine, " no good can come." If he had to marry at all, to please his father, why not, at least, choose a Princess who was intelligent, or beautiful, or both ? He wrote long, bitter letters to Grumbkow, urging him to persuade the King to change his mind about Elisabeth Christine. " My father wants to force me at the point of his stick to fall in love with her," he complains to Grumbkow, " but, unfortunately, I have not the temperament of a donkey. . . ." And then more bitterly, about marriage in general, about

women : " . . . above all, let's have no petticoat government anywhere, in any walk of life. I think a man who lets women rule him is the greatest coward on this earth, unworthy of the honourable name of man. . . ." Later, as life, with its disappointments and disillusionment, coarsened him, Frederick expressed himself much more crudely. When Fredersdorf, his groom, secretary, and intimate servant generally—" *le grand factotum du roi Fréderic*," as Voltaire called him—was married, Frederick wrote to him : " Have your marriage ceremony to-day rather than to-morrow if that will contribute to your care and comfort ; and if you want to keep a little page and a little scout with you as well, do so. . . ."

When Frederick realised that this marriage with Elisabeth Christine was inevitable he became hysterical. " There is still one way out," he wrote to Grumbkow ; " a pistol shot can free me from my life and from my suffering." Frederick never made any attempt to commit suicide, and, when he realised that Grumbkow remained unimpressed, he dropped the subject and tried to be philosophical about his marriage. Already he was determined never to consummate the union ; no one, not even his father, could force him to surrender this personal liberty. " I shall keep my word and marry," he assured Grumbkow, " but afterwards —it will be ' Good morning, madame, and *bon voyage*.' " He kept his word. Elisabeth Christine and he were married in June 1733. That night, leaving his startled bride alone in her apartments, he withdrew to his own and wrote to Wilhelmine : " Dearest sister, the whole ceremony is now over. Thank God that it is over."

As far as Frederick himself was concerned it was all over. He only harboured Elisabeth Christine under his roof until his father's death. Even until then Frederick saw to it that his wife and he met only when the conventions made it unavoidable. On such occasions he treated her with the greatest courtesy, but he never spared her with politely sarcastic remarks. Fortunately, Elisabeth Christine was so stupid that she never understood them.

Frederick did not think of his action in terms of unfairness to the girl. To him she was merely an unpleasant fact, necessary to keep the family peace ; and he always had a tendency to ignore unpleasant facts as much as possible. He never considered her as another individual, with as many human rights as himself. He had no feeling of moral obligation toward her. Elisabeth Christine had been brought up with the one aim of marrying some nice young Prince and of bearing some nice princely children. Her brief hope of becoming the mother of a future King made the ultimate barrenness of her life even more tragic. Besides, Frederick's mother treated her most unkindly. Sophie Dorothea unburdened her stored-up anger about the English marriage upon the innocent head of Elisabeth Christine. Her life was a wretched one. Probably Frederick would not have minded had she indulged from time to time in a discreet affair. " Madame can do as she chooses," he wrote to a friend before his marriage, " and I shall do as I choose. *Vive la liberté !* "

Whether it was her lack of charm or her virtuous nature which caused her to refrain will never be known, but the fact remains that she led a lonely life

to the end of her days. As soon as Frederick's father died he set up a household in Berlin for the unfortunate Queen—for Queen of Prussia she was, after all—and dined with her on rare occasions. That closed the matter for him, although he did remember her in his will : " To the Queen, my wife, I bequeath 10,000 thaler annually, as well as the allowance she now receives ; two barrels of wine annually, free firewood and free game for her table. . . . I ask my successor [his nephew], furthermore, to assign her a suitable apartment in the Berlin palace ; I also request that he show her the respect due to her as the widow of his uncle and as a Princess who has never wavered from the path of virtue."

Fifty-three years after their wedding, when Frederick was dying, Elisabeth ventured to send him a stiff little note saying how sorry she was that he was suffering such pain. He answered this note ; his answer, in fact, is the last but one of all his letters : " Madame, I very much appreciate the good wishes on my behalf which you are kind enough to express. But an attack of fever prevents my answering."

An anonymous contemporary cartoon, a woodcut made to celebrate Frederick's golden wedding, shows Elisabeth Christine standing so far away from him that her elaborate gown is not all in the picture. The tips of their fingers are barely touching. In the background stands a groom, a smirking smile on his face. Such was Frederick's marriage !

. . . . . .

Shortly after the wedding, Frederick returned to Ruppin for another year, while Elisabeth Christine

remained in Berlin, exposed to the moods and ill-temper of her mother-in-law. Frederick went to Berlin or Potsdam when he could not avoid it, but most of the time he remained quietly in Ruppin.

"I am here in my quiet retreat," he wrote to Wilhelmine. "I think France could be destroyed by the [Austrian] Emperor, the Kingdom of the Anti-Christ exterminated, the Holy Roman Empire turned upside down—yet I would not bestir myself. I think neither of Vienna, nor of Paris ; Warsaw is a city of which I know nothing, and the Rhine is to me an unknown river. If my dinner is only served and I can have a convivial time with friends, and if no storm harms my modest hut, let things move on as they will."

This mood did not last indefinitely. By the next spring Frederick was bored by the quiet life. He was too dependent upon intellectual stimulus from outside to like being alone indefinitely. But then, and thereafter, he tolerated only the company of his own choosing.

He was glad that a war was going on, which promised him a chance to leave Ruppin for a while. Stanislaus Leszynski was contesting the right of Augustus the Third to the throne of Poland. Owing to Frederick William's agreement with Augustus the Strong, Prussia was obliged to take part in this war. Unfortunately for the Central Powers, Leszynski happened to be the father-in-law of the King of France. Louis XV's army was stronger than their combined forces, and they suffered heavy losses. The war was finally concluded in 1739 by a compromise, through which Stanislaus received Lorraine until his death, when it was to revert to France. Augustus remained King of Poland.

Frederick was sent with his regiment to Phillipsburg, on the Rhine, where most of the fighting was taking place. His greatest personal experience during the campaign was his meeting with the famous Prince Eugene of Savoy, who was commanding the Austrian troops, though he was almost seventy years old. For the first time Frederick encountered in him a man who was a soldier and yet, in the youth's opinion, a scholar and a gentleman as well. In fact, Eugene had the reputation of possessing almost feminine charm. In one of her letters, the Duchess of Orleans, *née* Lieselotte von der Pfalz, who died in 1732, mentions how, in his youth, he and his great friend Turenne " often pretended they were ladies."

Eugene grew fond of Frederick. They were much together, and Frederick had his first lessons in strategy. He studied the situation at hand very carefully and objectively. " I do not feel at all sorry for the German Empire," he confessed to Wilhelmine ; " one can only say : *Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin !* For it was the acme of wrong politics to declare war on France, without having the necessary troops or sufficient money." He showed no particular concern over the Austrian defeat at Phillipsburg, nor was he much impressed by the horrors of war. " War and peace left him cold to the heart." " If the gentlemen wish to return home," he wrote to Wilhelmine, " I say to them : ' Be friends again.' If they don't, let them make war on each other. Perhaps my cold-bloodedness goes too far, and I become only an observer of their battles." In terms of human life the war did not cross his mind. When he was compelled to see the killed or wounded, his æsthetic sensibilities

were shocked, and he regarded such sights as a part of the day's work best forgotten. Poetically, however, he was moved to write verse on the horrors of war :

Enrôlé dessous les bannières
De ce Dieu rempli de fureur,
Tandis qu'il ravageait la terre,
J'ai su conserver ma douceur ;

Ah ! mortels, quelle est votre erreur,
De prêter vos mains meurtrières,
Et vos talens et vos lumières
Au meurtre, au carnage, à l'horreur ?

This habit of scribbling poems—and usually very bad ones—between battles caused Voltaire, years later, to exclaim that Frederick " surprises Europe, floods it with blood, impoverishes it, and writes verses in the meantime."

Frederick left the scene of battle early that autumn. Frederick William, after a vain attempt to take part in the war, had been forced by poor health to go home. In Berlin his disease was diagnosed as dropsy ; he was not expected to outlive the year. Frederick could not help but rejoice at this prospect. " They do not prophesy here that the King will have a long life," he admitted to Wilhelmine. " But I have resolved to be comforted . . . ; for, after all, I realise that I shall not experience good days as long as he lives. . . . If you were to see him again you would let him rest in peace, without being sad. . . . "

Finally the King recovered again, as was his habit, but in the meantime he was a trying patient. During this illness he was acutely religious. Had he not been bedridden he would undoubtedly have forced joint prayers and other rites on his family.

RHEINSBERG
where Frederick lived as Crown Prince

As soon as his father had recovered his health and his usual ill-temper, Frederick fled to Rheinsberg, a country house in the Mark Brandenburg, which his father had given him as a wedding present. This quiet spot became his retreat for the next six years. He left the little *Schloss* only when his military duties forced him to go to Ruppin, or when he was ordered to Berlin by Frederick William. On the whole, his father left him alone; he grunted occasional complaints about his son's indolence, but he no longer had the energy to do much harm. Elisabeth Christine was always unobtrusive.

For the first time in his life, Frederick was established in surroundings of his own choosing. He could dine and arise at whatever hour suited him. No one arranged his daily routine for him. He was free to plan his own life, and, except for his father's shadow, he had not a care in the world, and practically no responsibility.

He invited a number of men to make Rheinsberg their permanent home, and he corresponded with a great many more, chiefly with Voltaire. He was eager to learn something from each of his guests. "We have divided our activities into two categories," he described his life at Rheinsberg; "first the useful occupations and second the enjoyable ones. Among the useful studies I include philosophy, history, and languages; the agreeable ones are music, the acting of tragedies and comedies, masquerades and banquets which we give. Our serious occupations are, however, always given preference, and I may say that we are sensible about our pleasures, in so far as we only use them to give our minds a rest and to relieve somewhat our severe philosophical seriousness. . . ."

As his reader and literary adviser Frederick appointed Charles Etienne Jordan, a French Huguenot, who had once been a Lutheran minister. Knobelsdorff, an architect ; Algarotti, an Italian scientist ; Pesne, the Court painter from Berlin ; Graun, Frederick's music teacher, and Freiherr Dietrich von Keyserlingk, a former officer, Frederick's *philosophe guerrier*, lived permanently at Rheinsberg. Frederick always spoke of Jordan and Keyserlingk as his family. Jordan, whose " readiness for service " and " kindness of heart " Frederick never forgot, was a great favourite, and Keyserlingk was his most cherished friend and inseparable companion. " We must be parted for a little while," he once wrote sadly to Voltaire at the prospect of a brief separation from Keyserlingk. The two shared everything, even the correspondence with Voltaire. " He is keeping me company as I write this," the Prince wrote to Voltaire, " and he assures you of his friendship. Not a day passes in which we do not talk about you."

Frederick and his friends solemnly tried to forget that some of them were Prussians ; French was the language spoken at all times. Stiff military pictures in the Rheinsberg Schloss were replaced by Watteaus and others of the French school. Rheinsberg was called " Remusberg " ; they created a legend about Romulus's brother who had finally wandered to this part of Prussia. They called each other by classical names ; " Cesarion " sounded less Teutonic than Dietrich von Keyserlingk ; Jordan became " Hephaestion." In his younger days Frederick had never had a chance to be playful ; he seemed to be making up for it now.

Nevertheless, he did a great deal of work. He read

hungrily : metaphysics, philosophy, history, drama, poetry. He discussed everything he read with his friends ; he needed conversation and argument to crystallise ideas in his own mind. He wrote prolifically, chiefly letters. Even in his writings the reaction of another mind was almost a necessary stimulus.

He wrote pages and pages to Voltaire. His first letter to the great Frenchman was dated August 8, 1736. This correspondence continued for forty-four years, until Voltaire's death. There are almost six hundred letters, delicious reading. At first Frederick wrote rather timidly : " Sir, although I have not the satisfaction of knowing you personally, you are none the less well known to me by your works." But his idol's response soon encouraged him to " My dear friend, this title is due you . . ." " I consider it one of the joys of my life," he wrote to Voltaire a little later, " to be the contemporary of a man as distinguished as yourself ; but my happiness will not be complete unless some day I have the satisfaction of seeing you face to face."

Voltaire, who was living at Cirey with Madame de Châtelet, became the invisible god ruling over Rheinsberg. " Because the Apollo of Cirey wishes to light up the tiny atoms at Rheinsberg, we are all cultivating the arts and sciences here," Frederick wrote ; and Voltaire, always responsive to flattery, replied : " I ask of your Royal Highness that one of your first military campaigns shall be the recapture of Cirey, which was quite unjustly separated from Rheinsberg, to which it rightly belongs."

Frederick wanted to go to Cirey to visit Voltaire, but he could not get the paternal consent for such a

journey, He therefore decided to send his beloved " Cesarion " with gifts and respects for Voltaire and the " divine Emily." When all was arranged, Frederick became somewhat troubled. " I entrust to you my greatest treasure," he wrote to Voltaire ; " it is for you, sir, to return my friend to me. He is perhaps the only mortal worthy of becoming a citizen of Cirey, but please remember that he is all I have in the world, and that it would be a terrible injustice to rob me of him." After Keyserlingk's visit, Voltaire assured Frederick that " he had come only to be missed after his departure ; he is returning to the Prince whom he loves and who loves him in return. . . ."

Voltaire, as the " greatest genius France had produced," absorbed Frederick's literary interest. He loved everything French, not merely because it was the fashion. He looked down on the Germans as " laborious and profound. When they have mastered a subject they weigh down on it heavily. Their books are unbearably diffuse. If one could cure them of their heaviness and familiarise them a little with the graces," he did not " despair that his nation might produce some great men."

English literature did not appeal to him either ; he considered Shakespeare's plays " ridiculous farces." He got some pleasure out of Greek and Roman historians, but his real interest was centred in French literature then and always.

The most important thing Frederick wrote at Rheinsberg was an essay refuting Machiavelli's doctrine. He attacks Machiavelli's *Principe* chapter by chapter, so that his reader may find his " antidote step by step to the Italian's poison."

" Floods which devastate entire districts," he wrote, " lightning which ignites cities, and diseases which kill off the population of a country, are not as disastrous to the world as the dangerous ethics and unbridled passions of Kings."

In theory, the writer of this " Anti-Machiavelli " was undoubtedly a promising humanitarian. Philosophically, Frederick may have believed what he wrote, even in late years, when his actions contradicted these theories. But, then, there never *was* any co-ordination between what he wrote and what he did. Had he been able to write as he talked, his essays might have been more convincing. He was not a creative genius, but what made him remarkable for a young man in his position was the fact that he had enough insight to realise this. He knew that the daily admiration he received from his intimate circle at Rheinsberg was not objective. After all, he was the future King of Prussia, and this coloured the criticism even from friends. He was his own severest critic, and he knew that what he wrote was not great.

" . . . These verses and my bad prose," he wrote to Wilhelmine, " will tell you that I am a passionate student, and must, somehow, justify this passion which drives me from knowledge to knowledge, and increases my intellectual curiosity the more I learn. . . . Thus I circle around between science and art, but I feel my inability ever to attain the heights of the really great. Rulers are considered innate men of action, who accomplish everything they start out to do, but really they are usually just particular ignoramuses or, if they possess a spark of genius, their merits are extolled to the sky to such an extent that

their mediocrity appears gigantic." " If I were not a Prince," he wrote to Voltaire about the same time, " I should be but little. Your genius alone wins you esteem and envy and admiration. But I must have titles and armouries and revenues to attract the esteem of men."

Frederick revelled in such self-analysis, and seemed to wish that this peaceful life would continue indefinitely. He apparently felt no impulse for any but intellectual adventures. Apart from his immediate circle of friends, especially Keyserlingk, he craved no human associations. He had no desire for any intensive companionship with women, and he was quite satisfied with occasional visits from his sisters Ulrike and Charlotte. In general he was contented.

This quiet life came abruptly to an end early in 1739. Frederick William was again very seriously ill. This last illness dragged out for a year and a half. Every few months, and later every few weeks, the physicians thought the end was only a question of hours, and Frederick was summoned to Berlin again and again. He disliked these abrupt interruptions, and he hated and dreaded the days or weeks he was forced to spend at his father's bedside. To his intimates he referred to these compulsory visits as his " galley slavery," the cruellest thing in a galley slave's life being the indefinite period of his servitude ; by law the number of years was fixed, but in practice it frequently lasted for life. Sometimes he thought, bitterly, that his father would never die, that his illness was indeed interminable. Frederick William was more impossible than ever. The chief outlet for his discomfort was to rage at his son for past, present, and

future shortcomings. Frederick became " the target for the King's bitter attacks and the scapegoat for his temper." During this last illness Frederick William was again extremely religious. Ministers of the gospel were with him constantly. " His love of God has gone very far," Frederick wrote to Wilhelmine, " but there is no thought of any love for his neighbours."

Except to her and to his closest friends Frederick maintained a dutiful attitude towards his father, but several times the strain was reflected in his physical condition. During the years in Rheinsberg his general health had improved very much, but nervous strain of any kind still made him physically ill. Once during his father's last illness he suffered such an " intestinal cramp " that his physician was seriously alarmed.

In the spring of 1740, Frederick William seemed near the end at last. Frederick's good taste prevented him from writing even Wilhelmine enthusiastic letters about coming events, but to her he never waxed sentimental about his father, before or after his death. Wilhelmine, on the other hand, did let her filial piety get the better of her—or perhaps it was her wish to have been able to be a devoted daughter. Later she apologised for her outburst of feeling.

" Frankly," she wrote to her brother, " his death did actually affect me, though he did not always act toward me with paternal affection. Perhaps my feeling is due to the tradition of our bringing up, perhaps to an instinct of nature or because of the respect one owes a man, who was, after all, a great ruler—I do not know. . . . At any rate, I *was* much shaken by his death."

Frederick William died in Potsdam in June 1740. Frederick was King of Prussia.

CHAPTER IV

# EUROPE'S SURPRISE

## (1740–1745)

So far Europe had heard of Frederick only to pity him as the son of such a father. He had never been considered a person to be taken seriously. In Paris and London he was thought of as a gentle, intellectual youth, who liked pretty clothes and the amenities of life. He was said to be more fond of conversation than of action, and other rulers in Europe were satisfied that he was quite harmless : the ideal type of ruler for a little country like Prussia.

Soon after he became King, however, it was rumoured with surprise that he was not what he had seemed. Foreign Ambassadors in Berlin reported that, despite his charm of manner, he seemed to care less exclusively for the amenities than had been expected. Monsieur Valori, who came to Berlin with Louis XV's compliments for the new King of Prussia, wrote that " his manner is natural and charming, his voice is soft and ingratiating and might seem to indicate a great inner modesty amounting almost to timidity, especially when he first begins to talk, or when he talks with someone for the first time ; and this helps him win the hearts of his listeners, if he has made up his mind to charm them ; but if one looks a little more closely, one sees at once the sarcastic and contemptuous trait of his character, which a veil of mildness and benevolence covers only superficially."

" However," the Frenchman admitted, concluding his report, " *il a de très grandes qualités.*"

His father's Ministers thought that Frederick would become a bore, asking their advice about so many things and running to them for suggestions. But Grumbkow and the rest experienced the shock of their lives : Frederick dismissed some and retained others. In fact, he did as he pleased. Was he not King of Prussia, and they his servants ? There was particular consternation at Court when he retained Boden, Frederick William's thrifty Minister of Finance. It began to dawn on the men of his entourage that the new King might prove to be as stingy as his father. And yet he was so extravagant in other things : Duhan de Jandun, his old tutor, was granted a pension for life ; Fredersdorf, his faithful body-servant, was given Zernikow, a large estate near Rheinsberg, as his very own. Since when was the bourgeoisie so favoured that they were elevated into the land-holding class ? Preposterous, thought the Court ; the King would next call Fredersdorf " von," make him a nobleman. But all the silent antagonism, the hushed consternation, did not affect Frederick in the slightest. If he wanted to bring all his greyhounds from Rheinsberg to Berlin, making a zoo out of his study ; if he hated Berlin " so that his soles ached to get away," and preferred to make Potsdam his permanent residence, he did so, asking no one's advice, permitting suggestions from no one. Those were days full of surprises at the Prussian Court.

Frederick discarded his soft French clothes. Always, thereafter, he wore a stiff Prussian uniform. The *siogné* youth, in fantastic garments, had vanished for

ever ; a somewhat untidy young man in the stiffest of military coats had come to stay. Later he became more than casually untidy ; he spent too little time on his personal appearance ; he did not care whether his clothes were covered with tobacco stains or not.

The new King did not even permit interference in his management of the army. Shortly after his father's death old Fürst Dessau, one of Frederick William's most able generals, ventured to suggest—simply because he was genuinely interested in Frederick's future—that he, Fürst Dessau, should continue, as before, to be the King of Prussia's chief military adviser. Frederick said to him coldly, " Now that I am King I intend to administer all my affairs myself. I intend, furthermore, to be the only man who has any authority at all."

The Court in Berlin was amazed at Frederick's industry. Formerly his father had driven him to work ; now he showed an insatiable desire for activities of all kinds. He resumed his childhood habit of early rising and apparently intended to rule by himself, no matter how long he worked every day. " Each machine is made for a certain use : the clock to show the hours, the spit for roasting, the millstones for grinding. Let me go back to work then, as such is my lot," he once wrote. Yes, it was a shock to his Ministers, the way he worked. For years they had looked forward to a flute-playing King, who would let them go their own way. He tried, at first, to read all the letters which arrived addressed to the King of Prussia. In the morning his post was brought to him in huge clothes-baskets. He had a passion for detail, a passion which

never left him, even when he was planning really large projects, such as changing the map of Europe.

After his father had been decently buried, Frederick began settling up some outstanding accounts, consisting chiefly in actions Frederick William would have forbidden, for Frederick was making up for the repression of years. He wanted finally to oppose his father's authority and to assert himself. The Giant Guard Regiment, the greatest joy and pride of Frederick William's heart, was dissolved at once. Katte's father was made a Count, and promoted to the rank of field-marshal in the Prussian army. Keith was recalled from Wesel and stationed in Berlin as lieutenant-colonel. And, as a final and definite gesture, shattering poor Elisabeth Christine's hopes for ever, Frederick's brother, August William, was officially proclaimed "Prince of Prussia" and heir to the throne.

At last Frederick was able to rebel outwardly against his father's religious ardour. Frederick, who only a few years before had written to Wilhelmine that his hopes were entirely in the hands of his "Omnipotent Creator," who had declared "atheism to be a dogma which only insane men could follow," now revealed himself for the non-believer which he really was. "O God, if there is a God, have pity on my soul, if there is a soul," he once said.

He proclaimed complete religious freedom in Prussia. All his subjects were to "find blessedness in the faith of their own individual choosing." Though this concession chiefly, of course, was a post-mortem protest against his father, it was none the less an important decision for his country. As a further expression of his regard for the freedom of thought, Frederick

announced that henceforth public speeches were to be allowed in Prussia, and that the censorship of newspapers was to be abolished. He always encouraged complete freedom of speech among his subjects. On one occasion, years later, he noticed a group of *Berliners* gazing with craned necks at a poster affixed to a wall. He approached, and saw that it was a caricature of himself. He gave orders to have it lowered and hung at a more convenient height.

" You see," he said to his companions, when this had been done, " my people and I have an agreement, they *say* whatever they like and I *do* whatever I like."

. . . . . .

During the first months of his reign, Frederick travelled all over Prussia to receive the homage of his subjects. He loved this grand tour, as he did any opportunity to dramatise himself. After his *début*, which occurred in Königsberg, he asked Keyserlingk —who went with him, of course—whether he had done well.

" Yes," replied his friend, with even greater frankness than Frederick had expected, " but I know of one who is even better at the job, and that is Louis XV."

" That may well be," Frederick answered, somewhat piqued, but witty and quick as usual, " but, as far as that goes, Baron[1] might have done it even better."

From Königsberg and other eastern cities Frederick returned to Berlin, and from there he started for Strasbourg.

He looked forward to this journey into western Germany chiefly because Voltaire was then in Holland and he hoped to meet his idol at last. Frederick's first

[1] A famous actor at the Court of Louis XV.

thought, now that he was free to associate with whomever he chose, had been of Voltaire, and he planned to see him in Brussels.

Frederick wrote suggesting this meeting to Voltaire, who urged the King to bring along some " English drops," as he feared he would faint for joy at seeing Frederick at last, and would need to be artificially revived.

Originally Frederick planned to go from Strasbourg by boat to Wesel, and from there to Belgium for this meeting, but the excitement of the last few months began to tell on him, and during the Rhine trip he was very ill with a fever. Unpleasant memories of his last journey down the Rhine did not improve his condition. He was intensely excited at the thought of meeting Voltaire, and intense excitement still made him ill ; he was, in fact, getting to be a pronounced hypochondriac. " My health is something about which I am more than sensitive," he wrote to Dr. Eller, his Court physician, the year in which he became King, whom he had asked for prescriptions for all possible and impossible illnesses.

But this autumn of 1740, when Frederick and Voltaire met for the first time, the young King was really ill.

O fièvre [Voltaire wrote to him before his arrival],
injust fièvre, abandonne un héros
Qui rend le monde heureux, et qui du moins doit l'être;
Va tourmenter notre vieux prêtre ;
Va saisir, si tu veux, soixante cardinaux ;
Prends le pape et sa cour, ses monseigneurs, ses moines,
Va flétrir l'embonpoint des indolens chanoines ;
Laisse Frederick en répos.

Frederick was twenty-eight when he began his royal

career. Voltaire was forty-six, at the height of his fame and power. Even as a poet he was considered by his admirers as equal to Homer or Virgil. Perhaps all of them, including Frederick and the great Catherine, over-estimated his poetry and under-estimated his wit, which was too often turned against them.

They met, these two, on September 11, 1740, at the little Castle of Meuse, a few miles from Cleves. For almost half a century after this meeting they were devoted to each other ; they quarrelled, they hated each other at times, they lied to each other, they intrigued against each other, but they needed, none the less, the stimulus of each other's mind. Voltaire encountered in Frederick a maliciousness that matched his own. " And you," Frederick, in turn, wrote to Voltaire many years later, " are the man who enchanted me, whom I loved, and with whom I am always angry."

Voltaire arrived at the Castle of Meuse late one evening. He was conducted through several empty, dreary rooms. " Then," he writes, " I was led into His Majesty's private chamber. By the light of a candle I saw a miserable little cot, only about two feet and a half long, on which lay a little man dressed in a ridiculous dressing-gown made of heavy blue cloth. This was the King, who was perspiring and trembling under an inadequate cover, in an attack of fever. I bowed, and began our acquaintance by feeling his pulse, as though I were his chief physician. The attack passed. He arose and came to the table. Algarotti, Keyserlingk, his secretary—we all had supper together and discussed at length the immortality of the soul, freedom, and Plato's hermaphrodites." " I could not

help but be attracted by Frederick," Voltaire continues in his description of this meeting. " He had *esprit*, graciousness, and, what is more, was he not a King, and is this not always very seductive to human beings, frail as they are ? Usually it is we men of letters who flatter Kings, but this one praised *me* from head to foot, while, in the meantime, in Paris, Prior Desfontaines and other rascals are saying nasty things about me at least once a week."

Yes, Frederick did appreciate Voltaire, and was not shy in expressing his admiration ; his *Schwärmerei* for the strange-looking, ugly little Frenchman only increased after this meeting. Frederick exerted all his charm, and he knew by now that he had it in plenty ; he tried, despite the fact that he felt so wretched, to please Voltaire. But afterwards, a few days later, when Voltaire had left him, he wondered whether he had been a success with the Frenchman. In Voltaire's presence he was neither as sure of himself, nor as indifferent, as he was with other people. " Well, I have seen this Voltaire," he wrote to Jordan, " whom I had been so anxious to meet. I had an attack of fever, and I was physically and spiritually at a low ebb. But with people like him one may not be ill ; on the contrary, one should really feel better than usual. He has Cicero's eloquence, Pliny's gentleness, Agrippa's wisdom. He unites within himself the virtues and talents of the three greatest men of antiquity. His mind works incessantly. Every drop of ink coming from his pen is a spark of wit. . . . Madame de Châtelet is to be envied for calling him hers."

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When Frederick returned to Berlin after this

western journey his Ministers were still hoping that his desire for work had been only a passing fancy. They wished fervently that he might yet resume his quiet life at Rheinsberg. At any rate, it was fully expected, both at home and abroad, that he would confine his activities to the internal affairs of Prussia. He had every reason to do this ; Prussia was not involved in any bothersome alliances.

Even the German Emperor, Charles VI of Austria-Bohemia, was not demanding of Prussia any military assistance at the time. As a matter of fact, Austria was glad to have peace for a while. The failure of the Polish Succession War, and a Turkish campaign which followed, had undermined Austria's strength, at least temporarily. No one was bothering Prussia, and Frederick had every incentive not to bother Europe either, but his impulse to assert himself was rapidly getting the better of him. His unsuccessful conflicts with his father had almost convinced him that he was unable to deal with difficult situations. He wanted to prove to himself and to others that he could dominate the whole world if he chose. In his youth he had been defeated, thwarted. Now he craved above all to have power. He himself spoke of this desire as a " secret instinct." " My youth," he admitted in a letter to Jordan, " the fire of passions, the craving for glory, yes, and to hide nothing from you, curiosity—in other words, a secret instinct—tore me away from the sweetness of peace, which was mine, and the satisfaction of reading my name in the newspapers, and later in history, has seduced me." This primitive impulse was beginning to control his entire personality. Later, when he rationalised, the idea of

power as such fascinated him as well, and he began to think of Prussia in terms of a great international power. He wanted to rule a first-rate country or not to be a King at all. All or nothing for Frederick, always.

He looked about for worlds and fame to conquer. At first his prospects were not promising, but the reigning Duke of Jülich-Berg died suddenly. This gave him an excuse to take up Prussia's right to ownership in the duchy. This small principality, north-east of Cologne, had been causing verbal friction for about a hundred years, until it had been promised to Prussia by Emperor Charles VI when, in return, Frederick William had recognised the doctrine of " Pragmatic Sanction." Charles had been dilatory about his side of the bargain, and an Austrian representative still ruled in Jülich. Frederick William had been considerably upset by this breach of faith, but his feudal loyalty to the Emperor prevented him from making a fuss. Frederick, however, soon began to agitate about his rights in Jülich-Berg.

In the midst of this procedure, Frederick saw a much bigger opportunity to assert himself. On October 26 he was informed of Emperor Charles's sudden death from apoplexy, resulting from a mushroom dinner. " A dish of mushrooms," as Voltaire says, " changed the destinies of Europe."

Frederick had not completely recovered from his fever, and it was a very shaky and excited young man who heard the news of Charles's death. He felt at once that his big chance had come. He would attack Austria and reconquer Prussia's former possessions in Silesia. On the same day he wrote to Voltaire :

" This is the moment for the complete change of the old political systems. . . . " " The Emperor's death has destroyed all my peaceful ideas," he adds to Voltaire ; but to Algarotti, far away from any temptation to give Frederick away in France, he writes more frankly : " *Everything is prepared ;* all this only means the execution of plans which have been in my mind for a long time."

All of Europe was questioning the doctrine of " Pragmatic Sanction," and the right of Maria Theresa, Charles's daughter, to the Austrian throne. The Elector of Bavaria claimed at once to be Charles's rightful successor, at least in Bohemia.

Maria Theresa was twenty-four years old when her father died. She had been married a few years before to Duke Francis Stephen of Lorraine, who had lost his country to Stanislaus in the War of the Polish Succession. Since her marriage she had been busy bearing four children—unfortunately, all of them daughters. Before her marriage, when she had more time, she had been taught but little about the affairs of State. Charles, always hoping that Providence would yet give him a son, had never tempted Fate by giving Maria Theresa a boy's education.

Besides, she was not interested in a serious education. She adored her husband, her children, her home. Politics were not for women, anyway. By temperament her place was in the home. She revelled in tidiness and promptness like any German *Hausfrau.* She believed, above all, in the sanctity of the home. Her devotion to Francis, who did not always remember his marriage vows, was absolute, and her children were her greatest joy. " My dear Albert," she gently

reproved one of her sons-in-law, "not so many compliments. This 'Madame' at the beginning of your letter does not suit me at all. Another time say 'My dear mother' . . . sign your precious name Albert without ceremony."

She was distressed if things were not neat and clean and well dusted. "You must forgive the inkspots and corrections in this letter," she once apologised to Marie Antoinette. "I had to copy it three times ; the wind blew it to the ground twice. You know how draughty my rooms always are."

When the crown was suddenly placed on her head after her father's death she was not happy, but considered this an act of God, and resolved to do His wish as best she could. And she did far better than most people expected. She had great common sense, and realised that "the most important function of a monarch is the choice of his advisers."

When Charles died, Maria Theresa was not able to plunge at once into the affairs of State ; she was about to have another child. Francis Stephen had no army to put at his wife's disposal, and they were both exceedingly young and inexperienced. "No one, I think, will contradict me," she wrote later, "when I claim that it would be difficult to find another example in history in which a crowned head came to power in more difficult and unfortunate circumstances." Capello, a Venetian, then in Austria, remarks that the Court at Vienna was composed of "very young rulers and very old Ministers."

This situation made Frederick's prospects all the more hopeful. It intrigued him greatly to have a woman as his chief adversary. His indifference to

women was no longer passive ; it was fast developing into an almost pathological contempt. " We have so many examples of the foolishness to which men and rulers are reduced by women," he later advised his brother, the Prince of Prussia ; " . . . you undoubtedly are mindful enough of your reputation not to sell it by becoming the slave of any woman. . . . You see the confusion which is being created in France by the mistress of Louis XV." True to this attitude, he chose, as the thanksgiving service after Maria Theresa's first defeat in the war which followed, 1 Tim. ii. 11–12. " Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. . . . I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness."

With characteristic inconsistency, he theorised about Maria Theresa in quite a different vein after her death in 1780 : " After the death of Charles VI, Europe thought Austria was lost. A woman raised it again and maintained it with firmness. . . . She understood the art of finding capable Ministers. . . ."

. . . . . .

Frederick decided to march into Silesia as quickly as he could collect his forces, hoping to gain much by an unexpected blow. He made much of " Prussia's right " to the Silesian districts, but his excuses were very thin indeed. It is true, Austro-Bohemia and Brandenburg-Prussia had for several centuries quarrelled over certain Silesian possessions, but the matter had been finally settled many years before Frederick was born. One of the districts—the Duchy of Jägerndorf, south of Breslau—had been purchased by Brandenburg in 1523. About a hundred years later, during the Thirty Years' War, Emperor Ferdinand II

had disentitled Brandenburg in Jägerndorf. The "Law of the Empire," the so-called *Reichsrecht*, made this dispossession legal, but it was against all precedent. The rulers of Brandenburg, always subservient electors of the German Empire, had subsequently tried in vain to regain Jägerndorf by peaceful means.

The loss of the other Silesian Duchies of Brieg, Liegnitz, and Wohlau had been even more keenly regretted by Brandenburg-Prussia. These districts had been granted to Brandenburg by Bohemia as feudal tenure in 1537. In his capacity as Bohemian King the Emperor had, inconsistently, refused to recognise Brandenburg's right of possession in these duchies. More than seventy years before, in 1668, the Great Elector, Frederick William, had finally and definitely surrendered any claim to Brieg, Liegnitz, and Wohlau. In return he had been granted the immediate possession of the township of Schwiebus, in northern Silesia. He was evidently tired of eternal squabbling, and possession, however humble, seemed better than prolonged arguments. But Austria was not satisfied even then, and the Elector's son, Frederick the First of Prussia, was persuaded to return Schwiebus to Austria in return for grants of land in Friesland, on the North Sea coast. Unfair as her losses may have been, the fact remains that Prussia had, therefore, definitely surrendered these Silesian districts. It would have been quite within the law for Frederick to have re-opened negotiations with Austria for a new adjustment of Prussia's claims, but he had no valid excuse whatsoever for war, particularly without declaring his intentions to Austria first. The Silesian campaign was entirely a war of aggression.

Frederick decided to act as quickly and as secretly as possible. He decided to act alone. General Dessau, still loyal to Frederick, despite the way he had been treated, offered to take over the high command of the army and the responsibility for the war, an offer which Frederick refused ungraciously.

Rumours of his plans reached Vienna, but were completely discredited. An unexpected attack on Silesia seemed, to the easy-going Viennese, to fit in as little with Frederick's reputation as a gentle youth as it was inconsistent with Prussia's traditional loyalty towards Austria. After all, as Thomas Mann recalls, Frederick's ancestors, the Markgrafs of Brandenburg, had felt honoured when, as chamberlains, they were allowed to hand Maria Theresa's ancestors their wash-bowls. The Hohenzollerns had stood respectfully by while the Habsburgs washed themselves.

Maria Theresa herself simply refused to give any serious thoughts to the vague reports that Prussia was arming, that Frederick was planning to invade Silesia. In fact, one of her first official acts was to send a friendly envoy to Berlin asking him to vote for Francis Stephen in the coming election of a new German Emperor. Despite the fact that his preparations for war were by then well under way, Frederick sent back a most affable acquiescence. This was on November 9, 1740.

By December the invasion had begun. Only then did he send an envoy to Vienna asking Maria Theresa whether she would surrender "his" districts in Silesia. Frederick knew that Prussia's vote would mean a good deal to Francis Stephen, whom Maria Theresa at once appointed as her co-regent, and he

urged his envoy, Herr von Borche, to confer with Francis. Frederick could not conceive that a man's loyalty to his wife could outweigh his own ambitions. But Francis Stephen, whatever his other weaknesses may have been, refused to win Prussia at the expense of Maria Theresa's territorial rights. She herself would not consider giving up Silesia to the " bad man," as she always called Frederick. The war began.

Despite the optimism of inexperience, Frederick realised that his army, though thoroughly organised, was small to fight a great power like Austria. He counted on his enemy's weakened position, on the suddenness of his attack, and, above all, on that intangible quality, *moral*, in his own troops. He felt sure of the loyalty and devotion of his officers. On the eve of his departure from Berlin, he called his generals together and said to them in his most charming manner : " I am undertaking a war, gentlemen, in which I have no allies but your courage and goodwill."

At first matters were relatively simple. Austria's standing army in Silesia was small, and the Prussian invasion met with little resistance. The Protestant inhabitants of Silesia were always in opposition to the Austrian-Catholic régime, and Frederick won them over at once by installing thirty Protestant ministers in various Silesian localities. Glogau was the first city which offered serious resistance, but Frederick was too wise to use up his resources here before proceeding farther south. He left his reserve army, which surrounded the city, under the command of the Füerst von Dessau, still his loyal servant, and marched on to Breslau, the Silesian capital.

He was very happy. He had never realised that a war could be so exhilarating, even to the commander of an army. He had never been busier in his life, and he gloried in the hard work. To Voltaire he wrote :

> " We march every morning from seven until four in the afternoon. Then I dine, then work ; and then receive tiresome visitors : which means numerous insipid details to be looked after. These consist of difficult people to be placated ; individuals who are too temperamental must be restrained, lazy people must be egged on, and impatient ones must be quieted. There are rapacious people to be rendered more abstemious ; talkative ones to be listened to and dumb ones to be talked to ; one must drink with those who are thirsty and eat with those who are hungry ; one must be a Jew with Jews and a heathen with the heathens.
>
> " These are my occupations. I would gladly exchange them for others if it were not for this ghost called glory which appears so often. In truth, it is a great folly, but a folly one cannot forget if one is obsessed with it."

This was Frederick's mood as he marched towards Breslau, which surrendered with hardly a fight. He took possession of the city with all pomp on the third of January. This was all very well, but Frederick knew that to establish his prestige and fame in Europe he needed a victorious battle. He wanted it soon, before the Austrian army could be fully assembled ; but it was April before the time came, and by then, at Mollwitz, he was faced with a considerable enemy. The battle of Mollwitz, the first military victory of his career, was

won by Frederick William's well-disciplined army under the leadership of Count Schwerin, and *not* by Frederick himself. The cavalry, under Frederick's personal command, proved a failure, and was dispersed very quickly, largely because he himself was not used to so much noise and excitement. He lost his head completely. On his first field of battle Frederick was the weakness rather than the strength of Prussia, and his staff were afraid he would spoil their chances altogether. Schwerin and his other generals finally urged him to leave them to finish the task without him. Frederick was so frightened, his self-control had left him so completely, that he meekly accepted their advice and rode away like mad on his white horse. Messengers who followed that night to tell him of " his " victory found him huddled up in an old mill near the town of Oppeln, very near a complete nervous breakdown. Frederick's officers were too loyal and too much afraid of him to give him away, so that Europe did not hear the real story of this Prussian victory until many years later. Had this first battle been lost, Europe would have laughed at him. As it was, he was a made man. His vicarious success did not go to his head. Instead of gloating over the Prussian victory, he at once considered the battle analytically to determine what mistakes had been made, what mistakes *he* had made, so as to avoid them the next time. He realised also that he had by no means finished the task. It was just the beginning of his career. " If one has cut down a tree," he wrote, " it is wise to destroy the roots as well, lest the aftergrowht replace the tree in time."

After the battle of Mollwitz, Ambassadors from

neutral European countries, as well as from Austria, appeared in Frederick's headquarters to discuss the situation with him. France, too, was now anxious to form an alliance with Prussia, chiefly because England was then an ally of Austria's. Before the war, Louis XV had said about Frederick, " *C'est un fou ; cet homme là est fou.*"

Frederick hesitated at first. He hoped that Austria would decide to surrender, so that he would need no outside help ; he did not want to become involved in any alliances unless he had to do so ; he wanted to conquer all by himself. But rumours of Danish, Hessian, Hanoverian, and English troops in the Austrian camp were too insistent to be ignored. Frederick realised then that an alliance with France was necessary, and in 1741 a secret treaty was signed. Bavaria, still strenuously opposing Maria Theresa, had become one of his allies some months before, and Saxony joined this alliance some time later.

These allies were not altogether helpful to Frederick, as their own aims were naturally closer to their hearts than the welfare of Prussia. Charles Albrecht of Bavaria was far more eager to capture Bohemia than to march towards Vienna to defeat the Austrian army for Frederick. He succeeded in capturing Prague and having himself crowned King of Bohemia. Early the next year—1742—he became German Emperor. This election of Charles VII did not help Frederick, except as it weakened the position of Austria. What he needed was military assistance, and troops were hard to find. His ally, Augustus of Saxony, was not at all interested in helping Prussia. Unlike his father, he had not learned to combine a colourful private life

with clever politics. He emphasised the private life. His chief adviser, Count Brühl, had strong personal connections in Vienna, and wanted to avoid a break with Austria, despite Saxony's alliance with Prussia. Frederick finally decided to call upon Augustus personally, so he travelled to Dresden.

The interview was difficult, as it was almost time for the opera to begin. Augustus hated to miss the overture. Brühl, who was present, kept reminding the King that he might be late, but Frederick was so insistent that, to get rid of him and be off, Augustus at last consented to lend him the troops he wanted.

Frederick was much relieved at this success. He had really dreaded the interview ; in fact, his mental stress had been sufficient to need relief in an ode about Brühl :

> Tandis que la nature au repos est livrée,
> Ton esprit inquiet veille sur les Saxons,
> Tu crains déjà de voir la guerre declarée,
> Et la Prusse liguée avec cent nations,
> La vagabonde de l'Euphrate
> Ravager ces vastes champs,
> Qu'en esclave de Sarmate
> Cultive pour les Tyrans.

The inefficient and poorly equipped Saxon contingent made Frederick appreciate the discipline of his own troops. The upkeep of Augustus's army proved to be more expensive than he had anticipated. He wrote to Dresden asking for funds, but Augustus, who had just spent 400,000 thaler for his famous green diamond, still shown in Dresden, replied that he could not afford to help Frederick further. So Frederick was obliged to finance the Saxon troops himself. With their help he won the battle of Chotusitz in the following

May, and in June Maria Theresa was forced to sign the Peace of Breslau, turning over to Prussia the Silesian possessions. Frederick had got what he wanted, so he simply left his allies to their own devices and went home, leaving Austria free to use her energies against them as she saw fit.

When he returned to Berlin he realised that wars are expensive. The Prussian treasury had been reduced to a minimum. The new income from Silesia was considerable, but it took some time to regulate these funds. Nevertheless, he had all of the fortresses in the new provinces rebuilt at once, and increased his army, especially the cavalry. He was entirely prepared for Austria's " war of revenge."

Now that she was, at least temporarily, defeated, Frederick forgot her for the time being and began to think of more pleasant things. His chief aim was now to get Voltaire to Berlin. To this end he tried to make him even more unpopular in Paris than he already was. Frederick sent a fragment of one of Voltaire's letters, which was not complimentary to the French régime, to the Prussian Ambassador in Paris, with the following note :

> " I enclose a part of a letter from Voltaire, with the request that you pass it on discreetly to the Bishop of Mirepoix, so that he will in no way imagine that either you or I are connected with this affair. My intention is to create a breach between Voltaire and France, so that there will be nothing left for him to do but to come to me."

Voltaire soon found out about this intrigue. He was enraged.

" I swear," he wrote to a friend, " that I would rather live in a city in Switzerland, than to enjoy the favour of a King who, even in matters of friendship, cannot keep away from treachery."

Nevertheless he was, apparently, quite willing to go to Berlin for a visit, especially as he was given a semi-official errand, which promised to be interesting. At the time Madame de Châteauroux was exerting the major influence on Louis XV. She knew of Frederick's admiration for Voltaire, and decided to use him as the medium through which to remind Prussia of her duty as an ally. Voltaire accomplished nothing ; he was a poor agent at best ; added to which, Frederick had invited him to converse about poetry and not international alliances, and Voltaire's attempts to discuss politics were futile. Nevertheless, the visit was a great success ; the King and Voltaire were the centre of interest in Berlin. The English Ambassador reported to London :

> " Here in Berlin one talks of nothing but Voltaire. He reads his tragedies to Queens and Princesses until they weep, and surpasses the King in his satirical remarks and witty ideas. Nobody here is considered as cultured who has not Voltaire's works in his head or in his pocket, or who does not speak in rhymes."

When Voltaire left, about two months later, Frederick's methods of forcing him to Berlin were evidently forgotten, and the most affectionate sentiments prevailed on both sides. " I leave only," Voltaire wrote to Frederick, " my adorable sire, to return as

soon as my affairs are in order." And Frederick, still pressing him to make Berlin his permanent home, urged :

> " Choose your own apartment or house, make your own arrangements as to the most agreeable mode of life, make your own conditions, and I shall arrange the rest. You will always be entirely free and your own master ; I shall not pretend to hold you here except through friendship and your own satisfaction."

Frederick was determined to lure Voltaire to Potsdam eventually. It was the one thing now that he wanted, apart from his political, his military ambitions. But Voltaire wanted, above all, to return to Madame de Châtelet, an even greater *souveraine*, in his eyes, than the King of Prussia. Before leaving, Voltaire sent Frederick a *billet de congé* :

> Non, malgré vos vertus, non, malgré vos appas,
> Mon âme n'est point satisfaite ;
> Non, vous n'êtes qu'une coquette,
> Qui subjugez les cœurs et ne vous donnez pas.

And Frederick, never slow at biting back, wrote beneath the message, which he returned to his departing guest :

> Mon âme sont le prix de vos devins appas,
> Mais ne présumez point qu'elle soit satisfaite ;
> Traître, vous me quittez pour suivre une coquette,
> Moi, je ne vous quitterai pas.

Despite Frederick's refusal to discuss international alliances with Voltaire, circumstances soon forced Frederick to consider supporting France. Temporarily undisturbed by Prussia, Maria Theresa, with England

as her chief ally, was now waging a successful war against France and Bavaria. Their armies were driven back as far as the Rhine, and the unfortunate Charles was forced to evacuate Prague. Maria Theresa's success was making Frederick uncomfortable. He felt uneasy so far away from Silesia. His only excuse for renewed attacks on Maria Theresa was to support his ally, Emperor Charles, to whom he had heretofore given little, if any, consideration. Without the consent of Augustus, he marched through Saxony into Bohemia and took Prague. He then proceeded toward Vienna, and arrived in Budweis, not far from the Austrian frontier, but his good fortune did not continue. Saxony and Austria had formed a secret alliance (for which he retaliated later), and he suddenly found himself with the Saxons attacking in the rear and a formidable Austrian army before him. He was thus threatened to be cut off from Silesia altogether.

There was nothing left but a decisive and victorious battle or immediate retreat. The Austrians had little to gain by a battle, and, as they held the better position, Frederick could not risk attacking them. In the meantime, an Austrian contingent had already reoccupied Gratz, and Frederick was afraid to forfeit his other conquests. Therefore he retreated and considered himself lucky not to have lost more. Charles VII died in 1745, and his son, Maximilian, promised to support Maria Theresa's husband, Francis Stephen, in the coming elections, so there was no help to be hoped for from Bavaria. Francis was elected German Emperor in the same year.

Frederick himself returned to Berlin considerably depressed. For one thing, he decided not to hurry to

Silesia again until the Austrians had actually attacked his army there. In the meantime, funds in Berlin were very low. The Prussian treasury was practically exhausted, and Frederick decided to mint money from the silver services and candlesticks in the Berlin palace. He had these removed to the mint by night. He passionately loved secrecy of this kind, and, besides, it was important not to spread the news of his poverty.

. . . . . .

He then returned to the front and started a rumour, right among his own army, that he was retreating as far north as Breslau. He met the Austrians at the town of Hohenfriedberg, and they attacked, not knowing that practically the whole Prussian army was assembed there. Frederick did not lose his head this time. He gained a great strategic victory. Even Frederick William would have been proud of his son's soldiering ; he would have recognised the success of his own handiwork. The victorious battle of Hohenfriedberg meant the final defeat of the wistful, unmilitary boy who had loved nothing but his flute.

Then followed the victories of Soor and Kesselsdorf. Frederick's reputation was established beyond question. In the Peace of Dresden, Maria Theresa finally and irrevocably surrendered the Silesian possessions, and Frederick, as a condescending gesture and to keep the balance of power between Austria and France, promised to support Francis Stephen in the next Imperial Election. This was in December 1745. The general European war went on for three years more, but Frederick was satisfied for the time being, and felt that it was time to replenish his own treasury, and not bother further with his allies.

When he returned to Berlin, he was welcomed by the populace as " Frederick the Great." As a King he was becoming famous. As a human being he was becoming more and more friendless, more lonely, more unhappy.

While he had been gone, Jordan and his beloved Keyserlingk had both died, and he found Duhan on his deathbed. " I have lost the two friends of my heart," he wrote to him ; " they were closer to me than anyone I know. Now I am a stranger in Berlin, without connections, with no acquaintances and no real friends. I confess that I have succumbed to this loss, that I have not the strength to bear it."

He was never fortunate in his personal relations. It seemed that all his friends died, or became faithless, or bored him. And, besides, his many talents did not, perhaps, include a talent for friendship. Always he was on the defensive, always he was so afraid of being hurt that he was sarcastic, often full of malice towards all his intimates. " One must love nothing too much." This attitude, naturally enough, permeated, spoilt, all of his relationships. But alone, after Duhan died, he was miserable. He was growing very bitter. " Now I am afraid of Berlin, Potsdam, Charlottenburg," he wrote at this time. " I am afraid of all the places which recall sad memories of my friends, whom I have lost for ever."

CHAPTER V

# ACTIVITIES AT HOME

## (1745–1750)

There had been times, during the excitement of the war, when he had been able to drown this loneliness, forget it in action. The reaction after the war, the relative inactivity, the lack of tension, was hard to bear. Frederick was nervous and irritable, full of imaginary illnesses, dissatisfied with life. His success seemed almost meaningless ; there were no friends with whom to share it. The ovations which were showered upon him as the conquering hero did not touch him at all. He was too clever and far too cynical to be vain. Besides, he was so contemptuous of his fellow-countrymen that their adulation or disapproval meant little or nothing to him. He wanted Europe, the world, to call him *The Great*, and not only those Prussians.

He tried for a little while to find comfort in his brothers and sisters. But they did not prove to be very satisfactory companions. Most of them had so many troubles of their own that they were but small comfort to their brother Frederick.

Wilhelmine was living in Bayreuth, having a miserable time with her flighty husband, and continually forced to call on Frederick for financial help. Friederike Luise's marriage was even less successful ; she had one nervous breakdown after another, until she finally lost

her mind altogether and died insane. Sophie's husband, the Markgraf of Brandenburg-Schwedt, was as brutal as he was unfaithful, and she sent pitiful appeals for help to Frederick every few weeks. Luise Ulrike, the only one of Frederick William's children who made a really good match, was not much happier than her sisters. She married the Crown Prince of Sweden, but, clever as she was, her ambition was always greater than her ability. She never quite succeeded in her various plans ; she was not able, later, to keep Sweden out of the Seven Years' War, nor to influence her husband as she desired on other occasions. She became very bitter, and never hid this fact from her family. Her son, Gustavus III, who was finally murdered at a masquerade, had married a Danish Princess who was already involved with another gentleman in Stockholm. When Gustavus's son and heir was born, Luise Ulrike announced publicly that it was not his child, and her frankness made her socially impossible in Stockholm.

One of Frederick's sisters, Amalia, remained unmarried, thanks to the unkind way he handled her early love-affair. She had been very much attached to one of his officers, a Herr von der Trenck, and Frederick so strenuously opposed this alliance that he sentenced Trenck to fortress imprisonment and made Amalia's life a burden. She finally lost every desire to marry or have anything more to do with men. Later, Frederick evidently regretted his tactless brutality to her, and he gave her a beautiful palace on Unter den Linden. This palace is now the Soviet Embassy in Berlin. Portraits of Lenin decorate the walls.

Frederick always called on his sister when he went to Berlin. This may have cheered Amalia somewhat,

but these visits made him uncomfortable. His conscience troubled him whenever he saw her.

Frederick's sister Charlotte was the family miracle. She lived happily with her husband, the Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, for fifty years ; she was satisfied with life, and apparently had nothing to complain about.

After the Silesian Wars, Frederick was chiefly concerned with his brother August Wilhelm, the " Prince of Prussia" and heir to the throne.[1] Frederick was much interested in August Wilhelm ; he gave him a palace, arranged a marriage for him, and was with him a great deal. He assumed more or less a paternal attitude towards this brother, who was ten years his junior, but his own experience in paternal attitude had not been of the best. August Wilhelm tried, in turn, to be amenable ; he married the chosen wife " out of courtesy and obedience to the King, his brother." Later, when the marriage proved a complete failure and August Wilhelm, being naturally attracted by women, sought comfort elsewhere, Frederick was furious, and never had much use for him after this.

He rarely thought about his brother Ferdinand, who was only a child when he returned from Silesia. Ferdinand was entirely mediocre at all times, and " remarkable in neither appearance nor intelligence."

Frederick and his brother Henry, on the other hand, had much in common. He was fourteen years younger than Frederick, but even as a youth he was very much like the King. He always preferred the company of men to women ; he hated society, and lived quietly at the little *Schloss* in Rheinsberg, which Frederick

[1] Thereafter known as Crown Prince William.

FREDERICK AS A YOUNG KING

had given to him, among a few men friends. He was intelligent and responsive, and developed into an able general and a clever diplomat. But even this relationship was not always harmonious. " I see by your letter," Frederick wrote to him shortly after his return to Potsdam after the Silesian Wars, " that you want me to explain why I am dissatisfied with you. . . . I tried to win your heart . . . but, despite my kind treatment of you, I failed to win your friendship. . . . Your manner was always very cold towards me ; you lived with me, not like a brother, but as though I were a stranger. I was attracted to you by the bonds of affection as well as by the ties of blood. . . ."

Later, Frederick forced Henry to marry a Hessian Princess, whose fate was similar to that of Elisabeth Christine. An English gentleman at the Berlin Court remembers this marriage in his memoirs : " In the Prussian House it is not easy to find examples of conjugal happiness. But the aversion between Prince Henry and his wife is so intense that even when he is in Berlin he dines alone ; he spends most of his time in Rheinsberg. He and his wife do not dine together, they hardly speak, and they do not live together."

. . . . . .

Frederick had given the Rheinsberg Schloss to Henry chiefly because he had other plans for himself. During the war, when he was driven by work from morning until night, he thought often of the peaceful life at Rheinsberg. He would not face the fact that such a care-free life was hardly possible for an absolute monarch who took his task seriously, and he did take his seriously, no matter how often he talked about preferring to be a philosopher to a King.

While in Silesia he sketched the plans for " his second Rheinsberg," a country house in rococo style, to be built by Knobelsdorff on the hills near Potsdam. This estate was to be called Sans Souci, in honour of the plot of ground included for his future tomb, for " only when I am there," he had remarked, " shall I be free from care."

The name was an irony from the first. Sans Souci was not even built without friction. Frederick was determined to have the house constructed on the level of the ground, so that he could step directly into the garden from each of the rooms. Knobelsdorff, on the other hand, realised how damp the ground was so near the river Havel, and urged building a high basement under the main storey. Frederick stubbornly insisted on his ideas, and was so angry at Knobelsdorff that the quarrel led to a final breach. But Knobelsdorff was right ; it was very damp in Sans Souci. Perhaps Frederick regretted his stubbornness as he grew older and his gout became worse, but he could bear no opposition, even if it meant living in a damp house for years, or bungling another friendship.

He depended more and more on work as his one source of satisfaction. He was becoming more and more restless. Had he lived to-day, he would undoubtedly have been an inveterate cigarette-smoker. As it was, he consumed snuff incessantly. When he died, one hundred and thirty snuff-boxes were found among his possessions. While talking, his small, nervous hands constantly fidgeted with the snuff-box in his pocket. He hated to be alone a minute, and always craved an audience to which he could hold forth. He talked incessantly, and it was often difficult

for others to say a word. Once a friend, who had a matter of importance to discuss with the King, only succeeded in speaking when Frederick was obliged to use his handkerchief, and so interrupted his monologue for a moment.

When he returned from Silesia, his Ministers' worst fears concerning his capacity for work were realised. They were shocked to see how many details of his administration he attended to personally. In the summer he arose at three and in the winter at four, regardless of how late he had been up the previous night. He no longer took time to dress with any care at all, or even with cleanliness. He was an indefatigable worker. He became his own Minister of Finance, of Agriculture, of Commerce. There were no real Ministers in his service; all his officials were virtually clerks. He wrote or dictated all important letters of State himself, and would have preferred to write all routine letters as well.

He had made up his mind to reign by himself. He hated interference more than ever, and was developing a jealous, possessive passion for his work. Later he persuaded himself that Prussia needed an absolute monarch.

"In a State such as Prussia," he wrote, "it is absolutely necessary for the King to attend to his affairs alone; if he is clever, he will support public interests, which, after all, are his own. A Minister, on the other hand, has other interests at heart, as soon as his own advantage is involved. He assigns posts to his own followers, instead of promoting worthy individuals, and he seeks to maintain his own position through a chain of dependents. . . . If it is necessary

for a monarch to care for the internal affairs of his State alone, it is even more important for him to administer foreign policies by himself; he must conclude his treaties to his own advantage; he must make his plans and decisions by himself, particularly in serious and difficult situations.

"The close relation of finances, of internal and foreign policies, and the army, make it impossible to deal with any one of these factors without considering the others. In France, four Ministers rule the country: the Ministers of Finance, Navy, War, and Foreign Affairs. This is the cause for all the contradictions we find throughout French affairs. Jealously one of these men destroys what another has built up. Thus there is no system, no plan; accident rules; and everything in France becomes the plaything of Court intrigue. The British hear about everything that happens in Versailles. There are no secrets."

During the years following the Silesian Wars, Frederick concentrated on the internal affairs of Prussia and on the army. Most of his plans for the development of Prussia's trade, industry, and commerce did not mature until after the Seven Years' War, but he began to consider all of these problems immediately after the Silesian campaign.

An old gentleman named Cocceji, formerly a professor of law, had been trying for a long time to persuade some King of Prussia to let him undertake legal reform of the country. In 1738, Cocceji's scheme had been rejected by Frederick William. But Cocceji was an optimist. When Frederick returned from Silesia, the professor, who was then almost seventy, had a new outline of his plan all ready. Frederick was

leaving Berlin for a rest cure at Pyrmont, but Cocceji managed to see him before he left and pressed a copy of the outline into the royal hand.

Frederick took it with him and read the memorandum carefully. He was much bored with the inaction of a watering-place, and eagerly accepted any plan which promised so much work. When he returned to Berlin, he appointed Cocceji as his Chancellor and ordered him to proceed with the law reform at once. Frederick's judgment had been good. It was an excellent plan. Legal fees throughout the kingdom were regulated and made uniform, licences were taken away from incompetent or dishonest lawyers, and, furthermore (and this was Frederick's own contribution), a regulation became effective stipulating that the courts were to decide all pending cases within a year. The main achievement of Cocceji's reform was the creation of a machine whereby disagreements between Prussian subjects, no matter of what class or rank, were to be decided by law, and not by brute force or on the basis of prestige or position. Naturally such radical changes were not realised overnight, but Frederick's law reform nevertheless established and maintained an entirely new legal system in Prussia.

Frederick William had considered it his privilege, and the privilege of his officers and the nobility generally, to use his fists in any argument with the peasants or simple citizens. Frederick thoroughly disapproved of this method. " Heretofore a number of officials have abused the peasants with sticks and clubs," he wrote in his instructions of July 1749 to the Supreme Court of the Mark Brandenburg, " but

we do not permit such tyranny of our subjects, and we command that, henceforth, if it be proved that any official thus abuses peasants, he shall be condemned to six years' fortress imprisonment, no matter if he is of the highest rank."

In the meantime, Frederick was growing more and more attached to the profession of soldiering. " This trade can go to the devil," he had written to a friend during the Silesian War, " but I like it—a proof of the inconsistencies of the human mind." During the war the *moral* of his army had become somewhat lax, and his first efforts were to " re-introduce the excellent order and discipline which had made his troops unconquerable." He now reorganised his army, re-equipped his men, and made specific plans concerning recruiting and manœuvres. The basis of discipline, as he saw it, was " blind obedience " from the men to their officers, from the officers to their commanders, from the colonels to their generals, and from the generals to himself, as the highest in command, at all times and in all emergencies. He undertook this reorganisation of the army without any advice from his older generals ; he felt quite competent to do this without help. " I was brought up in the army," he wrote ; " my cradle was surrounded by arms. Beginning with a captaincy, I served in every grade of the army myself. During my youth my father instructed me in everything concerning the discipline, care, and training of the troops, as well as in military tactics. I can therefore speak to you with expert knowledge concerning these things."

He worked out the details of his famous *schiefe Schlachtordnung*—the wedge formation of his army

—which had won the battle of Mollwitz. He gave particular thought to the training of his officers. He believed in a more general education of cadets than Frederick William would have dreamed of; in fact, his future officers were educated, in their early teens, with boys who were planning to be diplomats or Government officials. Above all, instructors of these boys were ordered to give their pupils "a certain mental flexibility," which would fit them for serious work "along any line."

His entire scheme of education was planned for the boys of the nobility. Theoretically a plebeian could become an officer, but in practice Frederick upheld strictly the prerogative of the nobility in military careers. After the siege of Prague a soldier named Krauel was promoted to the rank of lieutenant, but Frederick changed his name to "von Ziskaberg." Despite this high-sounding name, however, Herr Krauel was never given the same chance as his fellow-officers. On another occasion a lieutenant, through his superior officer, asked the King's consent to marry the widow of a physician, but Frederick disapproved decidedly. "Instead of passing on to me such requests," he replied to the young man's colonel, "and showing an interest in this marriage, you should discourage your officers in every way from choosing such alliances; otherwise all of your officers will soon be bourgeois." Frederick's innate aversion to the middle class was just as strong, and almost as unreasonable for a man of his intelligence, as it had been in the days of his father's *Tabaks Kollegium.*

In May 1747 he had moved into Sans Souci, where he lived, until his death, from early spring until

late in the autumn ; and so afraid was he that he might be alone with his thoughts that he invited a number of friends to make Sans Souci their permanent home.

The sojourn at Sans Souci, which is practically without heating arrangements, was often rather hard on his guests, especially on those who were accustomed to warmer climates. Women were never invited ; Wilhelmine called Sans Souci a " monastery, with Frederick as the Father Superior," but Voltaire was probably nearer the truth when he remarked that the King lived there " like Plato and his friends." " Neither women nor ministers of the gospel ever entered ' Sans Souci,' " Voltaire writes ; " in short, Frederick lived there without a Court, without advisers, without any religion."

All the men in Frederick's little circle had done or written something which interested him. His talks with them and the evenings spent playing his flute in the music-room at Sans Souci were his chief recreations. No matter how hard he worked during the day, he was always ready for the bright and stimulating conversation which he demanded and expected at his dinner-table. Usually he dined in the round dining-room, the largest in the little palace. Large glass doors led out into the garden, and the room itself is still bright with crystal chandeliers and light-coloured walls. Frederick hated dark, gloomy rooms. They reminded him too poignantly of the dreary days of his childhood in his father's grim palace. He dined well. He was particular about his food, partly because he enjoyed it for its own sake and partly because all his life he suffered from nervous indigestion. When he engaged a new cook, a " sample dinner "

had to be prepared before the cook was permanently appointed. Even Voltaire admitted that the food served at Sans Souci " was as good as it could be in a country where there is neither game nor palatable meat of other kinds, nor fowls, and where the wheat must be bought in Magdeburg."

Sometimes, in the winter, he dined with one or two intimates in the City Palace, in a tiny light brown panelled room. In the centre of the room there is a round table—the " confidence " table, it is still called—the middle of which sank through the floor between courses, so that no servants were needed in the room itself.

Sans Souci became a " mixture of Athens and Sparta," where the King " acted Mars all the morning but played the rôle of Apollo in the evening." It is not so certain, however, that Frederick completely lost the mental attitude of Mars in the evening. His passion for heated debates about art or literature was sometimes very warlike indeed. He enjoyed arguments only up to a certain point. When his friends went further, or if they contradicted him, his sarcasm became bitter and he did not spare them, not because he did not really welcome their ideas, but his habit of being an absolute monarch was fast becoming a mental attitude, which influenced his entire being.

The men whom Frederick chose for his intimates were never German. To have heard the German language at his dinner-table would have spoilt his appetite and recalled unpleasant memories of his father. Besides, he wanted to discuss the arts and literature, and in his opinion the Germans, a nation of " clumsy and lazy people, unwilling to learn," had

never produced either. France was still his spiritual home. There is not a German book in his library in Sans Souci.

His guests were not, however, exclusively Frenchmen. In the course of years he included men from almost every country in Europe. Some of them stayed for months and some for years, but most of them sooner or later quarrelled with their host, or he with them. In many cases such friction was healed by a salubrious absence of a few months, but the atmosphere at Sans Souci was usually heavy with friction and intrigue.

The cleverest Italian at Sans Souci was Frederick's old friend Algarotti, who had popularised Newton in his *Newtonism for Ladies*. Frederick thought Algarotti a "fickle, fluttering butterfly," but he enjoyed him none the less, though he saw right through the Italian's flattery. "You have the same complaisance for my work," he once wrote to Algarotti, "which the Cardinals of Rome display for the Pope."

Each of the Frenchmen at Sans Souci considered himself the most indispensable. That is why they never agreed among themselves. Baculard d'Arnauld, once an ardent admirer of Voltaire and now madly jealous of his erstwhile master, was a young poet of whom great things were always expected. They never materialised, but in the meantime he furnished Frederick with diversion and a somewhat shallow literary conversation. The Marquis d'Argens, another Frenchman, had been called to Prussia to be the "poetic describer of 'Sans Souci.'" D'Argens often annoyed Frederick, as he suffered from more imaginary illnesses than "Hippocrates, Galen, or Æsculapius ever cured," but he was the King's great favourite for

many years, though Frederick was never as deeply attached to him as he had been to Katte or Keyserlingk. Frederick never took D'Argens or his diseases quite seriously. On one occasion, when D'Argens had left Potsdam to die or recover from some illness or other, Frederick wrote to him :

> " I suppose I must make up my mind not to see you again in this world, so I shall meet you in the valley of Josaphat, where I shall give you the paintings of ' Sans Souci,' for which your heart has been yearning for so long, and where we can finish reading Tacitus and where I shall have an opportunity of expressing to you my admiration for all your diseases. . . ."

Though D'Argens was Frederick's personal favourite he was never the recognised leader of the French group at Sans Souci. Before Voltaire arrived, Moreau de Maupertuis was the most prominent Frenchman. He had become famous after his studies of the shape of the earth, made in Lapland, and had been called to Berlin to be the President of the Prussian Academy, originally founded by Leibniz and revived by Frederick, who had urged Maupertuis :

> Écoutez du moins, je vous prie,
> Les tristes regrets qu'à Berlin
> Exhale notre Académie :
> Ce sont des plaintes d'orphelins
> Revendiquent en vous leur père.

Maupertuis was a conscientious, unimaginative, and small-minded scientist, always jealous of his personal prestige.

For years two Scotchmen did a great deal to counterbalance the temperamental outbursts of their fellow-guests. Frederick found a haven of rest in their " philosophical repose." George Keith, Lord Marshal of Scotland, had been received in Prussia with his younger brother, James, after an unsuccessful attempt to help the Stuart family. The ability of these two men to reduce people and events to their real value, and their canniness, were a great comfort to Frederick when things became too temperamental at Sans Souci. During the first week of his visit, James Keith wrote to a friend : " The King has more wit and humour than I could possibly describe. After a long stay here I shall know just as much about him as he wishes me to know, and his entire Cabinet does not know more." Frederick's association with the older Keith continued for almost thirty years. At one time he was the King's Ambassador to France, and when he was at Sans Souci he was always Frederick's great confidant in military matters. George Keith's loyalty also meant a great deal to Frederick ; he was one of the few men on earth whom Frederick really trusted. On one occasion Keith remarked to a fellow-guest, who was attacking the King behind his back : " I refuse to be the friend of a man who eats daily at the King's table only to attack him afterwards." Darget, who had been in the service of the French Ambassador to Berlin, was Frederick's secretary, and as his reader Frederick chose a physician, Jules Offray de La Mettrie, whose views as a materialist had become impossible in France after the publication of his *L'Homme machine*. La Mettrie, whom Voltaire once called the " leading gourmand of the world,"

died quite suddenly in 1751 from eating too many truffles, but during his four years at Sans Souci he was the buffoon and clown of Frederick's circle. " All who knew him are mourning his death," the King wrote ; " he was full of fun, a good devil, a good physician, and a very poor writer ; but, if one left his books unread, one could be satisfied with him."

For his human associations Frederick became more and more dependent upon the little group in Sans Souci. He was increasingly bored by Court life and society generally, and only went to Berlin for official functions which he could not possibly avoid. Even when his brother Henry was married, in 1752, he attended only the most necessary ceremonies. One of the chief functions of Count Pöllnitz, Frederick's Master of Ceremonies, was to report to the King what had occurred at various social gatherings. When the Count wrote to him of the festivities in connection with Henry's wedding, Frederick replied that " before I come to Berlin the next time, I shall employ a dancing-master and a young French marquis, who shall educate me in the *savoir faire* of the Great World."

He preferred his " monastery," where he did as he chose, regardless of form or convention.

Naturally, a Court consisting exclusively of men was conspicuous during the age of gallantry. Sans Souci gave Madame de Pompadour and her circle considerable food for gossip and amusement. Frederick, who was never quite indifferent to what was said of him in France, little as he cared what people said anywhere else, did not relish being ridiculed at Versailles. He made a rather pathetic attempt to direct the

thoughts of his friends and enemies into less conspicuous channels. The way to do this was obviously to cultivate the friendship of some lady, preferably one who was well known. He showed good taste while he was about it, and paid obvious attention to Barbarina, an Italian dancer, who was with the Royal Theatre in Berlin. He often summoned her to his box, and went so far as to have tea with her in her private rooms after she left the theatre. Europe, however, remained unconvinced. As Voltaire, rather cruelly, remarked, if Frederick liked Barbarina at all, it was simply because she had "*les jambes d'un homme.*" Frederick himself became rather bored, posing as the dancer's lover. "Let her wait for her money," he once wrote somewhat impatiently to the faithful Fredersdorf, who paid all his private bills. "On the 24th (of October, 1745) she can have it." He finally married her off to the son of Cocceji, and did all the outward and visible things indicating a scandal.

But Barbarina undoubtedly did a great service to Frederick's romantic biographers, who have used her as the charming feminine element with which to offset his arduous duties as a soldier and King and the intellectual interests he pursued at his very masculine round table at Sans Souci.

CHAPTER VI

# VOLTAIRE

## (1750–1753)

Frederick did not really consider any of his guests as his intellectual equals. Sometimes he despised them for their mediocrity—this was on days when they bored him—sometimes he derived some satisfaction out of it. His personal life, his friendships, he began to realise more poignantly than ever, were such a failure that, at least at his dinner-table, he craved to outwit his companions. But, no matter what his mood towards them, always he was lonely, with a depth of loneliness even he had not known before. It had been a shock for him to realise that his success as a conquering hero, his growing prestige in Europe, did not really relieve this aloneness.

Often his attitude towards his guests irritated them almost beyond endurance, the more so as they dared not express their irritation. After all, their livelihood, their future, everything, for some of them, depended upon the King of Prussia. So, usually, they vented their anger on each other, quarrelling as they could not quarrel with Frederick. He would find them whispering and gossiping together in the garden or in their own rooms.

They often felt all the more resentful towards Frederick because many of them *knew* so much more than he did. Only he could put up a better argument with ten facts in his head than they could with a

hundred. Few of them ever approached his quick intelligence and wit. He, in turn, was growing increasingly dissatisfied. He longed to associate with a mind whose swiftness was a match for his own. The desire to have Voltaire in Potsdam was becoming almost an obsession. Before him Frederick was actually humble (in writing), and his invitations to the Frenchman were more and more pressing. " You resemble the White Elephant," he wrote to Voltaire in 1749, " which causes the Shah of Persia and the Emperor of Mogul to fight each other, and which the victor uses to increase the number of his titles. Adieu. If you come here you will see as my list of honours : ' Frederick, by the Grace of God King of Prussia, Elector of Brandenburg, Possessor of Voltaire,' etc."

Voltaire was not so enthusiastic about going to Potsdam. He was almost sixty years old, his health was poor, and he had changed his habitation so often that he was not much inclined to make another move. The Prussian climate did not appeal to him at all ; he wanted warmth and sunshine ; and, banteringly, he made Frederick this suggestion :

> " I ask you to do me one favour, which would cost a man in your position but little effort : that is, to conquer Naples or Sicily, or the Kingdom of Granada or Andalusia. It is a pleasure to live in such places, where it is always warm. Your Majesty would visit these countries every year, as you do Glogau and your other Silesian possessions, and I should be awaiting you there, and would always be a most agreeable courtier."

Voltaire's chief reason, however, for refusing

Frederick was, of course, his profound attachment to Madame de Châtelet ; but even after her death, late in 1749, he could not decide to accept the King's invitation. All direct effort was apparently futile, so Frederick resumed his former method, and busily wrote letters to Paris telling tales on him and trying to make Voltaire even more unpopular in France. Life in Paris finally became so unpleasant that Voltaire finally decided to go to Potsdam, at least for a short while. Actually he stayed with Frederick for three years.

Voltaire had heard so much of Frederick's economy that he wisely arranged the financial details of his visit before he left home, for Voltaire, too, was a good business man. He wrote asking for Frederick's promise that money for the journey was to be deposited in a Berlin bank to his credit. Frederick was growing so impatient to have him that he consented at once, and promised Voltaire an annual income of 20,000 francs as long as he stayed in Potsdam. Voltaire was as surprised as he was delighted at Frederick's generosity, so he decided that this was the time to ask another favour. His niece, Madame de Denis, had been his housekeeper for years, and he found life more comfortable with her than without her. So he asked Frederick's permission to bring her to Potsdam. Frederick was incensed at the thought of a woman at Sans Souci, and flatly refused.

Voltaire, therefore, arrived alone in July 1750. Frederick was as delighted as a child to have his own way at last. A room, a bright corner room in Sans Souci, was especially prepared for the Frenchman, with coloured wood carving all around the panelling :

parrots to symbolise his talkativeness, monkeys to mock his homeliness, peacocks to show up his vanity. A queer way these two had of expressing their regard for each other.

Voltaire's fellow-guests were not pleased to hear that he was coming. In this they were united at last : they did not welcome such a formidable rival. Their reception of the star guest was somewhat forced ; they were jealous of him from the beginning, especially as Frederick showered his new guest with attentions. Voltaire, however, was sceptical from the beginning.

> " I have been handed over," he wrote to Madame de Denis, " in proper form to the King of Prussia. My marriage with him is therefore made, but will it be a happy one ? After a flirtation lasting so many years, this marriage was inevitable. My heart beat fast at the altar. . . ."

Frederick allowed Voltaire much more freedom than he granted the others. With the approach of winter the old man was allowed to live in the City Palace in Potsdam, whereas Frederick's other guests were forced to stay on in Sans Souci, where they shivered with the cold, there being no fireplaces, until late in the autumn. Always Frederick considered Voltaire's ill-health. He was particularly solicitous of his poor digestion. After all, in this they were fellow-sufferers. Voltaire was excused from the heavy military meal at noon at which Frederick received his officers, and appeared only for dinner in the evening. He appreciated this more than would have flattered Frederick.

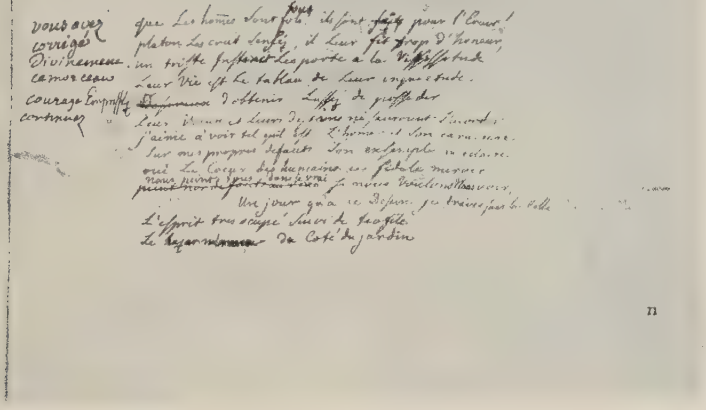
" I have extracted myself from the midday meal,"

# EPITRE X.

## A MON FRERE FERDINAND:

SUR

## LES VOEUX DES HUMAINS.



FACSIMILE OF FREDERICK'S HANDWRITING
*(with Voltaire's comments in the margin)*

he wrote to Madame de Denis ; " too many generals and too many Princes in attendance there. I could never become used to sitting opposite a King *en cérémonie*, and be obliged to talk with him in public. The evening meal is shorter, more gay, and more healthy. I should die in three months' time of grief and indigestion if I were obliged to dine every noon with a King in public." " When I have an attack of the colic I am inclined to tell all the Kings in the universe to go to the devil," he wrote to her later.

Voltaire spent most of his days alone, either strolling about the gardens of Sans Souci or working in his own room. His ugliness startled the honest Prussian gardeners working in Frederick's parks. The story of one gardener, who thought that the King had put man's clothes on a monkey and then let him loose, is still told in Potsdam. Voltaire himself told this story, which became traditional. Probably he invented it.

He spent most of his time in Potsdam on his *Siècle de Louis XIV* and on Frederick's verse. For Frederick made use of him at once. It was Voltaire's rather hopeless task to improve the King's literary style. In a way he admired Frederick's efforts, though he realised that the King would never be a great poet. " He is a French poet born in Berlin. He writes excellent verse . . . and has more imagination than I have, though I have more routine," he admitted, but he was annoyed by Frederick's carelessness. His work, whether prose or verse, usually showed signs of haste. It was never quite sincere. Voltaire often wondered whether " a King who rules entirely by himself ever could have the time to take pains and care with his verse."

Now Frederick knew perfectly well that he was not a good poet. He had no more illusions about himself than he had about other people. On the contrary, he grew harder with himself every year of his life. " My verse is not written for the public," he once wrote to Voltaire after the Frenchman had left Prussia ; " I have neither enough imagination nor do I ' possess ' the French language sufficiently well to write good verse ; and mediocre verse is detestable." By correspondence he went so far as to call himself an " amateur in everything he did," but it is one thing to *write* confessions of this kind, hoping, perhaps, for a soothing answer, and another to find yourself at a desk with a man like Voltaire sitting beside you tearing your poetry to pieces.

At first these sessions went very well : Voltaire tried to be tactful and Frederick tried to be humble. But these were not rôles to which either of them was very well suited. For a little while, however, all was serene. " I profit by his confidence," Voltaire wrote shortly after his arrival, " and tell him the truth more forcefully than I would to Arnaud or to my niece. He has never sent me to the stone-quarries for correcting his verse ; he thanks me, changes his poetry, and always for the better. He writes admirable verse. His prose is as good as his poetry, but he writes it all in too much haste. His friends here are good courtiers who have told him that all he does is perfect ; but what is really perfect is the fact that he trusts me more than he does these flatterers, and that he really loves me and senses the truth when he hears it."

. . . . . .

Voltaire kept himself entirely apart from the

amorous intrigues of his host and his fellow-guests. The friendship between him and Frederick was never anything but intellectual. Not that Voltaire had any moral scruples ; he wrote to Madame de Denis quite lightly about it all :

> J'ai passé l'âge des honnêtes amours
> Et n'ai point l'envie d'être page :
> Ce qu'on fait à Paphos et dans le voisinage
> M'est indifférent pour toujours.

But the old Frenchman was more tolerant with his mind than with his heart. He hated Frederick's " schoolboy amusements," which must, indeed, judging by the King's descriptions to Fredersdorf, whom he spared no details, however crude or intimate, have been undignified, to say the least. Once, when Fredersdorf—who, like the King, suffered a great deal from real or imaginary illnesses—had again recovered, Frederick celebrated his faithful servant's return to good health. " Yesterday I celebrated your recovery," he wrote to Fredersdorf in his atrocious German, " with two bottles of Hungarian wine. Carel " (Frederick's favourite page, a boy of fifteen) " squeaked with laughter when he was tickled. . . ."

Voltaire's aloofness did not increase his popularity among his fellow-guests. From the first he never seemed to be really a part of the life at Sans Souci. It was not only that they were jealous of him. Mentally he was too far above his companions to have been welcomed by them in any case. He was never tactful ; he never spared them, and they were increasingly afraid of his sarcasm. He delighted in exposing their shallow conversations and in undermining their

flimsy arguments. It began to dawn on Frederick very soon that Voltaire was not an element which could ever be smoothly assimilated into his little circle.

The actual break was not long in coming. Voltaire's first open conflict was with D'Arnaud, who intrigued against him whenever he could, either at Sans Souci or in letters to Paris. At first Voltaire did not take these attacks very seriously.

" I have had the misfortune," he wrote to a friend in France, " to have inspired my pupil with the most noble jealousy. This illustrious rival arrived here recommended by the sage D'Argens, and, like D'Argens, he had been consoling Paris with my approaching senility. He came here as the sole representative of his group . . . and when I arrived he was in despair, as the King treated me with special favours."

In the course of a few months, however, the constant friction between him and D'Arnaud became quite intolerable. It was obvious that Sans Souci was too small to harbour both of them. Voltaire refused to remain unless his enemy were removed. Frederick finally dismissed D'Arnaud, but he did so grudgingly. He admitted that D'Arnaud had wronged Voltaire, but he reminded him that a " generous man would have pardoned the sinner," whereas a vindictive one " pursues those whom he hates." " Furthermore," Frederick closed this note to Voltaire petulantly, " Arnaud has done me no harm, and it is only on your account that he has left ' Sans Souci.' "

Arnaud's dismissal taught the other guests a lesson, and for a while, at least, they refrained from attacking Voltaire.

In the meantime, however, Frederick and Voltaire were not getting along any too well themselves. They were both too vain and too nervous ; they had idealised each other for so long, made pictures of the other in their minds, that reality, when they lived together, was bound to be a shock to them both. Probably their friendship should never have left the literary stage.

The differences and similarities in their characters, which drew them close together in letters, created friction when they lived under the same roof. Besides, they each expected something so different from this friendship. For Frederick there was, and had been, only one Voltaire, and he had anticipated for years his idol's undivided attention. For Voltaire, on the other hand, Frederick was only one of the crowned heads in Europe who needed his intellectual support. Voltaire wanted privacy and solitude. Frederick was tired of mental solitude, and craved companionship. Voltaire's intellectual emancipation had been won at the cost of intense spiritual and physical suffering ; he had been hunted, imprisoned, and exiled for his opinions. Frederick's intellectual life was an evening pastime after he had administered his country and commanded his troops during the day.

Voltaire's manner often betrayed that he thought Frederick an amateur, and the King resented this bitterly. Frederick, on the other hand, had associated too long with people whom he considered his inferiors. His attitude, even toward Voltaire, reflected a despotic nature. They had waited too long for their personal relationship ; Frederick's one friendship, which might have been a success, was ruined by its untimeliness.

Frederick's other guests were only too glad to

encourage this growing disharmony between Voltaire and the King. One of them told Voltaire that the King had said about him : " We squeeze the orange and then throw away the peel." Another of the guests, in turn, whispered to Frederick that Voltaire, in referring to the King's verse, which he revised, said that " the King sent him his dirty linen to wash." The fact that they were acutely annoyed by gossip of this kind showed that their faith in each other had begun to ebb. But for many, many months they were both too vain to admit that they had made a mistake : Voltaire in coming to Prussia, Frederick in asking him to come and stay.

Soon, however, there was a serious breach : it concerned a question of money, a test few friendships can survive. During the Silesian Wars the King of Saxony had issued paper currency in great quantities. After the war this paper money had depreciated to about half its gold value. To protect his subjects against loss by this inflation, Frederick had included a clause in the Peace Treaty stipulating that Prussians who happened to own such paper money were to receive par value for it from the Saxon Government. Almost at once profiteering on a large scale began : quantities of this money were bought up by Prussian speculators in Holland and exchanged for par value at the Saxon agency in Berlin. Saxony finally complained emphatically, and Frederick then forbade such speculation. Naturally it was secretly continued by a number of individuals, regardless of the penalties in store for them in case of discovery.

During his first winter at Sans Souci, Voltaire heard of this simple way of amassing a small fortune.

Despite his allowance from Frederick, he hated to let this golden opportunity pass by. He secretly sent a Berlin moneylender, named Hirschel, to Dresden to purchase 40,000 francs' worth of paper currency, which Voltaire planned to sell back at par in Berlin. In some unknown way Frederick heard of this transaction and confronted Voltaire with the facts. Instead of making a clean breast of the matter, Voltaire denied having given Hirschel the money to buy currency, and claimed that he had sent him to Dresden to purchase jewellery and furs. Frederick was furious, and had Voltaire prosecuted as an illegal speculator. The complete legal record of this case still exists : a most unpleasant affair. Voltaire's method of clearing himself was anything but honest. He stuck to his story about the furs and the jewellery, and put all the blame for the purchase of the currency on poor Hirschel.

Voltaire's behaviour during the trial was as great a blow to Frederick as the bad taste he had shown. He refused to see him at all until the case was over. Voltaire succeeded before the law in placing the blame on Hirschel, and he himself was acquitted, except for a small fine. He joyously reported his victory to Frederick. This evidently disgusted the King even more. Nevertheless, he still wanted him at Sans Souci :

> " If you want to come back here, you are at liberty to do so. I do not wish to hear any more about lawsuits, including your own. As you have won it, I congratulate you, but I am glad the whole affair is ended. I trust you will have no more lawsuits, whether with the Old or with the New Testament. Such things leave scars, and even all the talents of

the greatest French genius cannot hide the stains which such a demeanour must leave on your good name and on your reputation."

Voltaire did return to Sans Souci. He and Frederick tried to live down the unpleasant interlude, but their friendship had received a shock from which it never recovered. On the surface they resumed their former habits of companionship, but the bloom was gone.

Their final breach was brought about by what, on the surface, was a scientific disagreement, but what, actually, was the rivalry between Voltaire and Maupertuis. There had been an academic argument between Maupertuis and König, a mathematician in Amsterdam, about Newton's law of gravity. Maupertuis claimed to have made an important discovery concerning the principle of the " earth's minimum resistance." König had disagreed, but he had hesitated about publishing his ideas, as he was acting as the representative of the Prussian Academy and did not consider the argument important enough to make it worth while contradicting Maupertuis, who was a very dictatorial President of the Academy. Maupertuis heard rumours of König's theories, and he finally demanded that he should publish a statement. König did so, mentioning in his report that Maupertuis's ideas were not original, but had been discovered by Leibniz years before. To prove this fact, he quoted an unpublished letter by Leibniz. Maupertuis was enraged ; in the name of the Academy he claimed that the Leibniz letter to which König referred was a forgery. König prepared an objective

answer to this accusation, which he called *Appeal to the Public*, but before this was printed an anonymous pamphlet, called *Answer from an Academician in Berlin*, was published in Berlin. This pamphlet, attacking Maupertuis's manner of dealing with a strictly scientific subject, which was Voltaire's contribution to the controversy, is entirely impersonal.

Frederick was beside himself. He knew that all Europe would read this attack on his beloved Academy, his scientific child. Anonymous pamphlets became very popular. Frederick wrote a silly one to Voltaire : *Letter from an Academician in Berlin to an Academician in Paris*. Suddenly Maupertuis seemed to him a great man. " Maupertuis is enjoying during his lifetime the glory which Homer did not receive until after his death." Frederick accused Voltaire of jealousy as his chief motive in attacking Maupertuis.

It may be that, had Voltaire been more fond of Maupertuis personally, he might have been less eager to attack him ; it may be also that Voltaire's sincere friendship for König, with whom he had lived at Cirey for two years, made him the more eager to take his part ; but his chief motive was his utter contempt for intellectual dishonesty or humbug of any kind. From this point of view Frederick's Academy had become intolerable to him. He was bitterly disappointed in Frederick.

" I did not come to Prussia as a courtier," he wrote to a friend in Paris, " but as a man of letters, and in literary disputes I recognise no Kings. I loved this Prince far too much, and I was grieved for his honour when he took sides against König ; that, without really knowing the fundamental facts in this dispute, he should have written such a violent pamphlet against

the two men defending König's philosophy—that is, against all of the enlightened people in Europe. He has been deceived by Maupertuis. This is not surprising, it is not dishonourable for a King to have been deceived, but it would have been to his honour had he admitted his mistake."

Voltaire became even more enraged against Maupertuis. He wrote yet another pamphlet exposing the head of the Academy—his famous *Diatribe du Dr. Akakia*, which made Maupertuis ridiculous all over Europe. This pamphlet was published anonymously in Potsdam, but there was no possible doubt as to the author. Frederick was so furious that he forgot, for the moment, that he was a champion of free speech. He ordered all available copies of the pamphlet to be publicly burned by hangmen on street corners in Berlin. This was on Christmas Eve, 1752.

Clearly, the end of Voltaire's visit was at hand. He returned to his host the gifts and honours he had showered upon him, and asked for his dismissal, but at first Frederick refused to let him go. Even now he hated to admit that this friendship, to which he had looked forward for fifteen years, was a failure. He was bitterly disappointed, and Voltaire was forced to exaggerate and emphasise his poor health before Frederick accepted his resignation. When the King finally did let him go, his dismissal was abrupt, to say the least. The last time they met was in public, on the King's parade ground in front of the City Palace in Potsdam. Frederick wrote to him, however :

" It was not necessary for you to pretend that you needed the cures at Plombières as an excuse to

request your dismissal. You are free to leave my service whenever you want to do so ; but before you go, leave me your certificate of appointment as my Chamberlain, your *croix de mérite*, the document granting your pension, and the book of my verse which I have entrusted to you."

Voltaire evidently forgot to return the copy of Frederick's published verse before he left, and, when he arrived in Frankfurt, he was amazed when the " Prussian Resident of the City," Frederick's representative, came to him demanding the book. Unfortunately, Voltaire had left it in Leipzig with the rest of his library, which was to be forwarded. Frankfurt was in no way under Frederick's jurisdiction, but Voltaire was confined to his house for a month and treated like a prisoner until the book finally arrived. Then the " Resident " was surprised to find the verse a published book. He thought that the King would not have made such a fuss about anything but a manuscript, so he sent a messenger to Potsdam to verify his orders. In the meantime, Voltaire was kept under arrest—a most unhappy conclusion of his sojourn east of the Rhine.

Frederick and Voltaire never saw each other again, but when their personal irritations had subsided they resumed their quarrels by letter, as of old.

" I could not live with you, nor without you," Voltaire wrote to Frederick later. " . . . remember that I shall always be fool enough to love you, just as I am fair enough to admire you."

Frederick, too, was willing to forget. " After all, you gave me more pleasure than pain. . . . Your

genius causes me to forgive all the things you said and published against me. They were hard and numerous, but I harbour no bitterness against you."

But, nevertheless, Frederick continued his half-humorous attacks on Voltaire's character :

Vous avez, je le présume,
En chaque main une plume ;
L'une, confite en douceur,
Charme par son ton flatteur
L'amour propre qu'elle allume,
L'abrévant de son erreur.
L'autre est un glaive vengeur,
Une Tisiphone et sa sœur
Ont plongé dans le bitume
Et toute l'acre noirceur
De l'infernale amertume.

When Voltaire died, in 1778, Frederick dropped this attitude completely. " I was born much too soon, but I do not regret it. I have seen Voltaire." And to Voltaire's enemies he says, in his official *Eloge* of the Frenchman, presented, ironically enough, to the Berlin Academy : " No matter how great is the hate of these mad creatures and their cowardly vengeance, which attacks even the dead, their wild shouts cannot stain the memory of Voltaire. The most favourable fate which they can anticipate is that they themselves, as well as their evil intrigues, will sink into oblivion, while Voltaire's glory will grow from age to age and his name will become immortal."

CHAPTER VII

# THE BEGINNING OF THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

## (1750–1756)

Europe as a whole was on the defensive against Frederick—quite naturally so, considering how he had startled the world when he fought and won his wars in Silesia. He made people in other European countries distinctly uneasy. Count Brühl, who disliked Frederick as much as ever, wrote, after Russia, in 1753, had decided " to oppose every further aggrandisement of that monarch " : " The deliberations of the Grand Council are so much the more glorious to Russia in so far as there can be nothing more beneficial to the common cause than previously to settle the effectual means of destroying the overgrown power of Prussia, and the unbounded ambition of that Court."

Maria Theresa was most directly concerned with the rise of Prussia ; she had more to regret than a shifting balance of power. The actual loss of Silesia rankled in her otherwise gentle soul, and she did not like to think about her numerous military defeats. She found much sympathy in Europe. Empress Elisabeth of Russia, whom Frederick consistently and frankly detested, was heart and soul with Maria Theresa ; the two had formed a defensive alliance against Prussia within a year after the Second Silesian War.

Frederick and Elisabeth had not always been

enemies ; on the contrary, he had frankly approved the banishment of her rival, the infant pretender Iwan VI. She had asked him to recommend and send to Russia a suitable wife for her nephew Peter, the heir to the throne. Elisabeth had suggested that Frederick's sister Ulrike would be very acceptable. Frederick had scoffed at the idea : *his* sister for that good-for-nothing Peter ; *his* sister to live in that barbarian country. No. Instead, he had looked around for the most harmless and undistinguished little German Princess he could find. He found Sophie Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst. Naturally he did not guess—who could have guessed it ?—that little Sophie would turn out to be his illustrious rival and great contemporary, Catherine the Great—" *la Russiene que j'abhorre*," as he once wrote of her to Voltaire.

Such amicable feelings between Elisabeth and Frederick had not lasted long. Their relationship had grown less and less friendly, especially after Elisabeth's Chancellor, Alexei Petrowitch Bestusheff-Rjumin, came into power. Bestusheff had never trusted Frederick, even while he still played the flute ; and her clever adviser took pains to point out to Elisabeth that Prussia might one day be a formidable enemy. Frederick, in turn, had by no means fostered friendly feelings with Elisabeth. His dislike of women often found an outlet in pointed remarks about his eastern neighbour ; it became a habit with him to make unpleasant allusions to her private life. Elisabeth had friends in Berlin who delighted in passing on his comments. Naturally she did not like to have it said that she enjoyed her *vodka* a bit too much, or to realise that Frederick followed her personal alliances

so closely. She finally became as angry with him as even Maria Theresa could have wished, and she forbade anyone at her Court to mention his name. Catherine the Great never forgot " the topics which Elisabeth disliked." " In her presence," says Catherine in her diary, " one was not permitted to speak about the King of Prussia, of Voltaire, of illnesses, of the dead, of beautiful women, of French customs, or of the sciences."

Elisabeth's simple-minded nephew, Peter, who adored Frederick from afar, made pathetic attempts to smooth over their quarrels ; this friction between his idol and his aunt was uncomfortable. Frederick was foolish to let his dislike of women drive him to a breach with Elisabeth—Russia was not an ally to be thrown away lightly—but his contempt for women was growing beyond his common sense. " Mine is the fate of Orpheus," he wrote later to Voltaire about Elisabeth, Maria Theresa, and Madame de Pompadour, " the same type of women who pursued him are trying to destroy me, but they will not have the chance."

Naturally Elisabeth and Maria Theresa were eager to find other allies against Frederick. They invited Saxony, which Frederick compared to " a ship without a compass, driven to and fro by the wind and by the waves," to join their alliance at once, but the danger of an open breach with Prussia was obvious even to Brühl. Saxony did not officially join Austria and Russia, but Augustus became a none-the-less active partner to their pact, though he remained discreetly silent about his activities.

France was still officially a Prussian ally. Frederick

was conscious of a " desire on her part to expand her frontiers to the Rhine," but he believed that her traditional rivalry with Austria would prevent a union between the two countries. He " felt sure that France would not hesitate a moment to sacrifice her ally, Prussia, to her own advantage," but he was as firmly convinced that she had " an enduring interest to humble Austria," and that this would keep her aloof from the Austro-Russian alliance. A union between France and Austria seemed to him inconceivable. His worship of French arts and letters never for a moment affected his distrust of France as a political ally.

Maria Theresa, too, realised how difficult it would be to overcome France's feeling of rivalry against Austria, but she resolved to let nothing prevent her from acquiring such a powerful ally against Frederick. To oppose him she, for her part, was willing to co-operate with anyone. She sent her Foreign Minister, Count Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, to Paris as her Ambassador. Maria Theresa knew that it would be difficult even for such an able diplomat to win France over, but he was instructed to take years for his task if necessary. It was difficult—even more difficult than she had feared—but in five years Kaunitz had finally persuaded Louis XV—*and* Madame de Pompadour—to join the Austro-Russian alliance. On all possible and impossible occasions Kaunitz had pointed out to them the advantage of such a union ; he continually emphasised the great danger of Frederick's ascendency for every country in Europe, especially for France.

When, in 1756, France finally joined the alliance against him, Frederick put all the blame on Madame

de Pompadour. He accused her of mercenary interests in the whole affair ; " she is only trying to get rich," he maintained, and he was furious at the thought that a " King of Prussia should be obliged to consider a demoiselle de Poisson at all, especially if she is arrogant and lacking in the respect she owes crowned heads." Maria Theresa, on the other hand, who disapproved vehemently of Mademoiselle Poisson's immoral life, became friendly, and wrote Madame de Pompadour " cousinly " and " affectionate " letters.

France and England, in the meantime, were at war about their colonies in North America. The French were trying to establish themselves in the Ohio Valley, in order to connect their southern and Canadian possessions on the American continent. This, of course, would have prevented British expansion in America, and England was therefore interested in promoting any war which would keep France busy on the European continent. Pitt, who came into power in 1756, supported Prussia from the first, and concluded an Anglo-Prussian Treaty that same year. This " anti-French " alliance was Louis XV's official reason for joining Maria Theresa and Elisabeth. " The friends of my enemies are my enemies " : England was his enemy, therefore her allies were also his enemies ; thus he justified his alliance with Austria and Russia.

England, already exhausted by her colonial wars, was Frederick's only ally. He stood practically alone against the " Great Coalition "—Austria, Russia, and France. He had hoped that the Scandinavian countries, at least, would help him. Ulrike was trying hard, and rather tactlessly, to create pro-Prussian feeling in

Sweden, but she was not successful, and her husband's country joined Austria. Denmark, in turn, was bound to Sweden by a " Maritime Pact," and followed her lead. Holland promised Austria that she would remain neutral. England could promise Prussia but little material help.

The very idea of a war against so many enemies seemed like madness. Frederick's chances were slight, but he knew that victory would make him the ruler of a really great country. In case of defeat he would no longer rule at all. More than ever he wanted all or nothing.

But it became more and more evident that he could not maintain his position in Europe, nor keep Silesia indefinitely, without another war. For a time he had hoped that this would not be necessary. " A brilliant achievement like the Silesian campaigns," he wrote with his usual frankness, " is like an original book, which is successful, but the imitations of which fall very flat. The capture of Silesia has aroused jealousy all over Europe, and we have frightened all of our neighbours. My life is too short to lull them again into a feeling of safety towards me."

His neighbours, in turn, were not enjoying the " frightened state " to which he had reduced them ; they felt that the only way to wipe out the Prussian danger was to defeat Frederick once and for all. By the middle of 1756 he realised that the war could not be postponed much longer. " Things are coming to a head," he wrote to his brother Henry ; " there will be no way out but to be quicker than our enemy in attack."

Frederick was amazingly calm at the prospects

before him. He felt increasingly that, after all, *sa sacré majesté le Hasard* decides what happens in this " miserable world." He was learning to accept the decisions of Fate with stoicism, though not always without bitterness. " Dame Fortune has turned her back on me," he confessed later, " but I must be prepared for this, for, after all, she is a woman, and I am not a gallant."

It was not only his fatalism which helped him to face the war so quietly. He was again becoming restless ; many of his duties had become routine tasks, and his intellectual activities no longer satisfied him. At times life was very dull : after Voltaire's departure his other friends seemed colourless ; his dinner-table no longer interested him. " Our society at ' Sans Souci ' has gone to the devil : the fool [Voltaire] is in Switzerland, Algarotti is seldom about, Maupertuis is ill, and D'Argens has hurt his little finger and therefore carries his arm in a sling as though he had been wounded by a cannon ball." Frederick often felt like " separating himself from the society of poets " altogether, " he had found so many rascals among them."

The idea of being an absolute monarch had long since ceased to be thrilling ; he was groping for a new centre of interest, something to care for passionately. He began to think of Prussia as this something, as a possession to be loved, to be protected, a possession worthy of becoming his *raison d'être.*

He longed for fresh, knotty problems, for difficult situations : there would be plenty of both in a war against all Europe. The suffering of his subjects, and the loss of lives in war, meant little or nothing to him.

Even in peace-time he had prescribed the death-penalty for every soldier who even "grumbled" against his non-commissioned officer. Frederick did not believe that a "ruler could afford to show mercy in such cases." Except in so far as they weakened his army, he was indifferent to casualties among the rank and file. Like most generals, he was kindly in his rare direct dealings with his men. This kindness cost him nothing, and he was probably sincere on such occasions, but he never considered wars in terms of human life. To him, as to his father, a Prussian soldier was not an individual, but a part of his army, which was his to command, to do with just as he liked. Frederick William's attitudes were becoming more and more his own.

Frederick knew all about the plans Maria Theresa and her friends were making. He paid his spies well, and a faithful clerk in the secret archives in Dresden was easily bribed to become one of his trusted agents. He had secret agents in Vienna, Moscow, Paris. He heard from them that the "defence" alliance had taken on a somewhat different colour. He learned that Russia had promised to join in an attack on Prussia, if Austria decided to take the initiative. He did not need his agents' reports to know that Maria Theresa had been preparing her revenge ever since the Silesian Wars. Her army had been increased, and she was far stronger than in 1740. She knew that in the coming war her husband, now Emperor Francis I of Austria, would summon all of his Electorate States to help Austria. Most of them were now very jealous of Frederick, and glad to further his destruction. Before the Silesian Wars, Prussia had been a quiet and

retiring Electorate State in the German Empire, and few of the States had been more loyal to their Emperor. The rise to power of any one of these electorates meant decentralisation for the Empire as a whole.

The reports from Frederick's agents grew more and more specific. He learned that Francis's army was being fully equipped for war, and that Maria Theresa had stationed an army corps in Bohemia near the Silesian frontier.

As a matter of fact, Frederick had begun his preparations some months earlier. He had again been the first to arm. He had reinforced his troops in Pomerania, near the Polish border ; he had sent all kinds of army supplies to Silesia ; he had recalled officers who had been on leave.

Austria and Prussia were ready to begin hostilities ; each hoped the other would be the aggressor. Frederick's impatience rose from day to day. He could not bear the suspense. He hated waiting for anything or anybody. It gave him indigestion. Finally he decided to take the initiative, but now he cared enough about his prestige in Europe not to attack without a gesture of warning to the enemy.

On July 18 he ordered Baron von Klinggräffen, his military attaché in Vienna, to ask Maria Theresa whether she had sent her army to Bohemia " to attack Prussia." Naturally she denied this. " In the present crisis, involving all Europe," she wrote to Klinggräffen, " it is my duty to take all measures for the protection of Austria and her allies." Frederick, who had fully expected an evasive answer, demanded a clearer statement. Klinggräffen, therefore, again asked Maria Theresa to explain why her army was in

Bohemia. She did not answer at all ; clearly she had nothing more to say. Frederick made one more gesture of inquiry ; this time Klinggräffen was to make it quite clear in Vienna that " if Maria Theresa's intentions are unimpeachable, the time has come for her to say so. If, however, she sends me another answer as vague as the vision of an oracle, her silence will confirm my fears concerning the dangerous plans she has plotted against me with Russia. The consequences will be her own fault. I call upon heaven to witness that I am innocent of the disaster which will follow."

Again Maria Theresa remained silent. Frederick decided that now he had ample excuse to declare war. He decided to act without further delay. On the 29th of August, 60,000 Prussians suddenly appeared at the Saxon frontier, marched into the country, and occupied Dresden. Officially Saxony had signed no agreement against Prussia, which meant that Frederick had violated her neutrality. It was all so sudden that even Augustus was shocked into a realisation of the wrong which had been done him. He forgot about his operas and his green diamond. He withdrew his army to Pirna, on the Bohemian frontier. Augustus became the martyred King of Europe. The neutrality of his little country had been violated.

The invasion of Saxony was the chief topic of conversation everywhere. Stories of Prussian atrocities travelled with greater speed than seemed possible. Frederick became the symbol of " frightfulness " all over Europe. Those who ventured a vague defence of his position were immediately ostracised

everywhere as "Pro-Prussian." People were either "Pro-Frederick" or "Anti-Frederick"; their attitude towards him became a moral criterion. He was the most conspicuous personality in Europe. He himself took all this calmly. "During the great turmoil which I am about to experience," he wrote to Voltaire, "I shall not have time to know if they are libelling me in Europe, nor if they are tearing me to pieces."

An anonymous English contemporary,[1] who at the time of writing, when the war was over, was sufficiently pro-Frederick to be tactful, at least, comments as follows on this Saxon invasion: "The reader cannot but stop here one moment to picture to himself the dismal state of Saxony. Without a sovereign, and His Prussian Majesty governing the whole electorate as absolutely as he did in Brandenburg. . . . It is true the severity of the Prussian discipline was such that the country suffered less from them than they would have done from any other army in the world; but, then, the hardships which the poor peasants and burghers felt were very terrible, from the licentious disposition of the conquering soldiers, which, though discipline greatly discouraged, yet it could never perfectly subdue it."

Frederick never considered the invasion of Saxony as a moral issue. To him it was merely an unpleasant necessity. "At the beginning of the war," he writes in his *History of the Seven Years' War*, "it was first of all imperative to prevent Saxony from meddling in the affair, thus harming Prussia. To carry on the war in Bohemia it was also necessary to march through Saxony; if one had not taken possession of this country, an enemy would have been left in the rear,

[1] See Bibliography.

who could have prevented the Prussians from using the Elbe for transportation . . . that is virtually what the Saxons did in 1740."

Personally, Frederick cared very little what the world thought of him, but he realised the practical importance of defending his invasion of Saxony. Later, when it was time for peace, the question of his " war guilt " would affect the reparations he could expect—or would be forced to grant. He planned to disclose Saxony's secret understanding with Austria and Russia at once. His faithful agent had sent him copies of the letters which had passed between Vienna and Dresden, but he needed the originals to convince the world. When Augustus fled to Pirna, these letters had been left with the Queen of Saxony, who remained in Dresden. She had hidden the correspondence carefully in her own apartments.

Frederick's method of acquiring these letters soon became a favourite " atrocity story " all over Europe. The Queen's daughter, who was married to Louis XV's son, was the first to describe how her mother had been abused. She told her friends at Versailles that the Queen had courageously refused, that the officer had finally used brute force to wring them from her. There was undoubtedly some truth in this story, and Frederick went so far as to justify himself later, when he wrote his *History* of the war :

" The Queen tried to disobey my orders to surrender the letters. It was very difficult to make her see that it was better for her to give in as a courtesy to the King of Prussia, than to rebel against a command which was perhaps a little more severe than one might have wished."

At any rate, Frederick secured the letters. He then tried to prove to the world at once, in a *Letter to the Public*, published in Berlin, that Saxony had never been neutral, and that his invasion was justified.

Frederick's headquarters were in Dresden, and he spent the first few weeks of his campaign negotiating with the camp at Pirna. He could not afford to march into Bohemia with an undefeated enemy army behind him, nor did he want to consume his forces in a battle against the Saxons, unless this became inevitable. He wanted Augustus's oath that he would take no part in the war, and that he would remain strictly neutral in all emergencies. Augustus was in a most difficult position ; his camp in Pirna was cut off from fresh supplies of food, and he was not sure when the Austrians would come to the rescue. Nevertheless, supported by Brühl, who was with him, he refused to promise Frederick anything. The Austrians finally arrived, but Frederick defeated them overwhelmingly near the village of Lobositz. After this victory he felt that " nothing more in the world was impossible for his army," but he could not exploit his success by pursuing the retreating Austrians, as the Saxons had to be dealt with first. Had it not been for this resistance offered by Saxony, Frederick might have defeated the Austrians in several decisive battles at once, and the war might well have been much shorter.

As it was, he realised that there was nothing to do but to fight the Saxons. He finally attacked and defeated Augustus, who was forced to turn over his entire army to Frederick. The Saxon soldiers were put into Prussian uniforms and compelled to take the oath of allegiance to Frederick. He was afraid to

assimilate Saxon officers into his army in the same way. He could hardly expect them to be loyal to him, so they were discharged on oath that they would not fight against Frederick during the entire war.

Augustus departed for Poland, his "other kingdom," but the Queen preferred to remain in Dresden to intrigue against Frederick and his officers. Frederick feared her presence no longer, but it seems strange that she did not run away from the Prussians when she had this chance. It is possible that perhaps her treatment at the hands of the Prussian officers was not entirely displeasing to her after all.

CHAPTER VIII

# DEFEATS AND VICTORIES

## (1756–1763)

Frederick spent the winter in Dresden planning his spring campaign. Above all he needed money, and the Saxon treasury was a godsend to him. He helped himself liberally to Augustus's thalers, and sought ways and means to make more. He reduced the salaries of some Saxon officials, and dismissed others altogether. He took over the Royal Porcelain Factory in Meissen, and sold its products for his own profit.

Frederick was busy. From morning until evening, now, he had enough to do to make him forget his restlessness, his growing discontent, his loneliness, at least temporarily. Saxony as well as Prussia had to be administered, apart from everything else.

Though he hated to admit it even to himself, he was disappointed in his first campaign. He had hoped for a more decisive defeat of the Austrians, but he consoled himself by remembering his own exemplary conduct. " I did not take a single step," he wrote to Fürst Dessau, now his favourite general, " without considering every detail, and I remained cold-blooded in circumstances which could easily turn one's head."

But towards himself he had no illusions. Often he acted the bold, courageous, self-assured King towards others, but towards himself he was honest. He was sometimes hypocritical, but never self-deceptive.

Naturally he wrote as he did to Fürst Dessau ; to one of his generals he would not admit his anxiety concerning the future ; but to Algarotti he wrote : " Whatever we may accomplish, however, we are not conceited enough not to realise that we are not living in the century of Cæsars. At present, I believe, the most one can accomplish is the maximum mediocrity. The possibilities of this century do not go beyond mediocrity." And, as a postscript to this letter, he says, referring to the autumn's campaign : " The bagatelles which occurred this year were merely the prologue of what will happen next year."

He was fully aware of the seriousness of his situation : he did his best to equip his army well ; his troops were reinforced ; every able-bodied Prussian was trained for active service.

At the beginning of the war Frederick's troops numbered about 200,000 men—a small army when he contemplated the 500,000 soldiers at the disposal of the enemy. He realised also that it would be necessary to divide his forces ; his enemies surrounded him on all sides and were able to attack his various frontiers at once. " I am like a porcupine," he wrote to Voltaire, " which bristles to defend itself at all points. I am not so sure that my bristles are good, but one must use all one's faculties, such as they are."

In Dresden, Frederick thought of the future very calmly and unemotionally. He sent orders to his Ministers in Berlin covering all possible emergencies. He told them what to do should the French capture Hanover, or the Russians invade East Prussia, or his army be defeated in Saxony. He decided that in case of any ill fortune the royal family, the justices of the

Supreme Court, his Ministers, and the "State Treasury," were to be saved first of all.

He prepared for the possibility of his own death. "Should I be killed," he wrote to his Prime Minister and former teacher, Count Finkenstein, "affairs of State shall be continued without the slightest alteration and with no notice of the fact that authority has changed hands. In the event of my death the oath of allegiance to my brother must be given in Prussia and Silesia at once."

Frederick also faced the possibility that he might be taken prisoner. He knew how his enemies would rejoice at such a golden opportunity to humiliate him —how they would demand of Prussia a big price for his liberty, either in money or in territory. In such an event his liberty, so he thought, would not be worth while : why buy it only to be the humble King of a humbled country ? He knew, however, that, were he to find himself in the hands of the enemy, he would forget all these noble resolutions, that all he would want would be to get home again. He wanted to protect himself against his own weakness. "Should Fate cause me to be taken prisoner by the enemy," he commanded his Ministers, "I forbid your showing the slightest consideration for my person, or paying attention to what I might write to you while I am a prisoner. If such a misfortune should occur, I am willing to sacrifice myself for the State. Everyone is then to obey my brother, who, in common with all my Ministers and generals, is pledged, at the cost of his life, that neither territorial secessions nor ransoms shall be offered to buy my freedom, and that the war will be continued just as though I had never existed ! "

Frederick did not give these orders only for the reason that his life and liberty would be in constant danger. He was also playing with the idea of taking Fate into his own hands. The thought of suicide was a comfort to him all through the war. He constantly carried a little phial with poison in the breast pocket of his uniform. Several times he definitely planned to " end his misery." Once he wrote to Wilhelmine suggesting that they should commit suicide at the same time, she in Bayreuth and he on the battlefield. " Those who remain in this world," he wrote to her, " will be forced to carry on the tribulations which we have borne so long." But the little phial remained untouched, and he left the matter of life and death to " hazard, which must decide our fate."

Although he never attempted suicide, he remained indifferent to life. He was soon considered the most courageous general in the Prussian army. He was always in the most dangerous part of his battlefields, and on one occasion three horses were shot away from under him in quick succession, but he remained untouched throughout the entire war.

Surrounded by enemies, he carried on the war for seven years. Except for three or four months every winter, which he spent in Dresden, or Leipzig, or Breslau, he was always on active service, either on the field of battle or toiling along the road between Silesia and the province of Brandenburg. He marched back and forth across Prussia with his army innumerable times, in winter and summer ; sometimes the gout in his hands was so bad that he could hardly clasp his horse's reins, some nights he was so exhausted that he fell asleep in his saddle. He suffered acutely from

indigestion, but he had less time to think of his health, good or bad ; he became shockingly careless of his person ; he never bathed and rarely washed, his uniforms were disgustingly dirty, his hair unkempt.

There was never a chance for him to relax either physically or mentally. He was always on the alert. " My rôle is all the more difficult," he wrote to Voltaire, " as I cannot allow myself to make the slightest error in judgment, and as I must act wisely and judiciously eight months of the year. . . . I shall do what I can," he continued, " but I find the task very difficult."

During the winter months, every year of the war, he made pathetic attempts to resume his literary interests, but he was always so exhausted physically that his body consumed most of his energies. Everyone was surprised that he did not succumb to the physical strain. " I am amazed," he wrote to D'Argens from Dresden, " at the resistance of my frail constitution. It is surprising the way I stand up against conditions, the mere contemplation of which would have caused me to shudder three years ago." It rested him physically and mentally to write poetry before he went to bed at night, or after he had concentrated for hours on the plans for a coming battle. " I write to divert myself," he confessed to Voltaire, " during the intervals which occur, no matter how lively the war."

But these intervals were few. France was sending an army across the Rhine to attack the Hanoverian frontier ; Russian troops were preparing to march into East Prussia ; Francis's Reichsarmee was ready to attack, and Sweden was arming.

Frederick's second campaign, in the spring of 1757,

was as successful as the first. He defeated an Austrian army corps at Reichenberg, in Bohemia, and then proceeded to Prague, where another Austrian contingent was assembled. His most able generals, Schwerin and Dessau, urged him to give his troops a rest after the long march and the strenuous day at Reichenberg, but Frederick refused their advice. He conducted the war as autocratically as he ruled Prussia at home. On the battlefield he was even more secretive than he was at his desk ; often even his own generals did not know his plan of attack until the day of a battle. Frederick did not believe in councils of war ; he wanted to decide everything himself, in his own way. " He who can hold his tongue will win great victories." Often this principle was very costly in human life ; his casualties were appalling, for his experienced generals usually knew far better than he how to align his troops to best advantage.

Despite Dessau's and Schwerin's warning, he attacked the Austrians at Prague. He won a great victory—" the enemy was dispersed like sand before the wind "—but Schwerin and eighteen thousand Prussian soldiers were killed in this battle. Frederick's conscience did trouble him, and he wrote :

> Que dirai-je de vous, Héros couverts de gloire,
> A qui la Prusse doit sa seconde victoire ?
> Rien ne vous ébranla, ces perfides Saxons
> Méditant en secret d'infames trahisons.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Schwerin, Trusches, During, vous perdites la vie,
> Votre sort glorieux est digne qu'on l'envie.

Despite the Austrian defeat, Prague refused to surrender. Frederick's persistent siege of the city was soon told all over Europe as another story of his

" frightfulness." Red-hot cannon-balls were constantly shot into the city ; the food shortage became acute ; but still there was no surrender. Then Frederick heard that an Austrian detachment had arrived at Kollin, a town near Prague, and he decided to send some of his troops to attack the Austrians there. Dessau knew that they were too numerous to be defeated by a handful of Prussians, and urged Frederick to await developments. This time he was furious at being contradicted. He threatened to kill Dessau if he did not mind his own business, so the old man was forced to give in ; as a result, the Prussian troops near Kollin suffered the greatest defeat Frederick had ever known.

" My only relief," he wrote to D'Argens, " is the work I am forced to accomplish every day, and the incessant diversions which the large number of my enemies afford. Had I fallen at Kollin, I should now be in a quiet harbour where I should no longer fear the storms, but I must sail ahead on this stormy sea, until a silent corner of this earth gives me the happiness which I could not find in this world." This time Frederick took his losses with the seriousness they deserved ; he was growing far less flippant than he had been before the war. " You, who are only a spectator of this bloody tragedy," he wrote to Voltaire, " can well afford to hiss the drama we are enacting."

Kollin was not to be Frederick's last disappointment that year. He was forced to withdraw from Prague ; in two detachments the Prussian army retreated northward along the Elbe. One of these, commanded by Crown Prince William, was attacked by an Austrian army corps. William, who was very ill

himself, realised that his men were too exhausted for resistance. He, therefore, continued his retreat, though he knew that his brother never considered the weariness of his troops in such emergencies. Frederick was beside himself with anger when he heard what his brother had done. " You don't know what you want," he wrote to him bitterly. " You will always be a miserable officer." William was discharged from the army in disgrace, and Frederick swore that henceforth " he would leave his brother strictly alone, to deal with his caprices and his bad behaviour by himself." Not for a moment did he take William's poor health into consideration.

When the Crown Prince died the next year, Frederick was only grudgingly forgiving. " In view of his good heart," he wrote to Wilhelmine, " and his other admirable qualities, I bore his irregular conduct with patience." Frederick was growing really hard. As a defence against his father's brutality he had early learned to affect a callous manner, but now his hardness was becoming part of his nature.

. . . . . .

In the meantime the French had crossed the Rhine and had defeated the Hanoverian troops near Hanover. When Frederick heard of this, he hurried north with 20,000 men, leaving the rest of his army in Silesia, under General Winterfeld's command. During Frederick's absence Winterfeld was defeated, but Frederick managed to hold his own against Emperor Francis's troops, which he encountered in Thuringia. In the meantime the Russians were invading East Prussia.

Frederick was now completely surrounded by his

enemies. But he kept up his courage and self-respect. "The news of one defeat no longer depresses me," he confessed to Wilhelmine. "I have already had too much bad news. Nevertheless, I am still defying misfortune, and I believe that, so far, my conduct has been free from all weakness." Strength, brute strength —his father's ideal—had become his own. He had irrevocably chosen the career his father had planned for him.

At least his strength was rewarded ; in November he defeated Francis's troops and a French detachment at Rossbach. "Thirty thousand Frenchmen and 20,000 Imperial soldiers fled shamefully before five Prussian battalions and a few squadrons," writes Voltaire of this Rossbach battle. ". . . The military discipline established by Frederick's father and strengthened by Frederick himself were the real cause of this strange victory."

Immediately after the battle he marched his weary men back to Silesia and defeated the Austrians at Leuthen. By December he had again driven them out of Silesia. He spent the next two months in Breslau, "resting in his room," walking slowly to the Cathedral to gaze for hours at the Bernini Madonna, and planning his next campaign. More and more he felt himself a mere pawn of Fate, "running about the country and finding new enemies at every cross-road." "I am only a street urchin compared with Alexander," he replied to an effusive letter from D'Argens ; "necessity, which is the mother of invention, has forced me to act." He seemed to have forgotten entirely that it was really he, that it was really his ambition, which had been largely responsible for this war.

He felt completely alone at Breslau. It was usual for the wives of the Prussian officers to spend the winter months with their husbands, and in the midst of this temporary family life he was particularly lonely. He had tried to persuade D'Argens to spend a few weeks in Breslau, but the Frenchman was too much afraid for his health to come. " My divine marquis," Frederick had implored him in vain, " now that you have spent eight months in bed and are well rested, can't you make up your mind to spend the winter with me in Silesia, if everything is quiet here? I wonder which will be the stronger, your friendship or your laziness? . . . Do not refuse me the comfort which I find in your company, and come to visit me." But D'Argens did not come.

Frederick was glad when the winter was over and he could get away from Breslau. As soon as it was warm enough he went to southern Bohemia. This time he decided to await the Austrian attack; he was growing less reckless, for the casualties in his aggressive battles had been tremendous.

While he was waiting, the news reached him that the Russians were gaining ground in East Prussia. Frederick's army in Prussia was small, so he immediately marched his troops up north, and defeated the Russians at Zorndorf in one of the most horrible battles of the war. " The Russians, being thrown into the most terrible confusion," a contemporary historian comments, " plundered their own baggage . . . intoxicated themselves with brandy, and no longer distinguished friends from foes, but fired upon each other. . . ."

Without a day's rest after this " horrible carnage,"

Frederick marched his army back to Silesia. The Austrians were assembled near the village of Hochkirch, on the Saxon border. Frederick was so tired that he could not think clearly, but he refused to listen to the advice of his staff and attacked the enemy. He was severely defeated. Silesia was again lost to Prussia.

On the same day Wilhelmine died in Bayreuth. When Frederick heard of her death he was completely shaken. In his loneliness during the war he had clung more and more to her as the one person whom he could always trust. " You can judge my grief at the loss I have suffered," he wrote to Voltaire ; " there are some misfortunes which one can overcome by character and courage, but there are others which are not made easier by all the strength one can muster ; all philosophy is useless. Such is the grief which my unlucky star heaps upon me in the most miserable moment of my life."

The next year Frederick's situation went from bad to worse. Everything seemed to be against him. He was at a loss to know how he could finance the war any further, for Prussia's treasury was almost empty. After the battle of Kollin the silver services from all his palaces in Berlin and Potsdam had been turned into money, but this amounted to only 500,000 thaler. Every possible thaler had been pressed out of Saxony. Frederick had reduced the pay of his soldiers and officers to a minimum. He had also levied a forced " war loan " upon his subjects, but all of these measures had not been sufficient. There was nothing left but to inflate his currency. He added 33,000,000 " silver " thaler to his income by debasing the Prussian coinage. He also printed paper money.

This method, temporarily at least, relieved Frederick's financial difficulties. But his army had been so reduced that he was forced into the defensive. He loathed passivity more than ever, especially when everything seemed so hopeless. Prussia was now in a desperate state. Entire villages had been demolished, and the poverty and suffering among his subjects were incredible. " Philosophy is a good cure for past and future ills, but in the present suffering it is entirely powerless," he admitted.

It was in this mood that he experienced the worst military defeat of his career. He fought the Russians near Kunersdorf, a village east of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder. Again his defeat would have been less serious had he listened to advice. It was a very hot summer day, but by five in the afternoon his troops had made considerable headway, and about half of the Russian army had been dispersed. Frederick's generals urged him to be satisfied, and not to pursue the enemy farther, but he would not listen to reason. He had made a serious mistake ; his troops were exhausted ; their discipline had broken down, and by evening literally thousands of Prussian soldiers were running away from the scene of battle as fast as they could run.

Frederick came to Kunersdorf with about 53,000 men. Two days later only 32,000 were left in his camp. The fact that the enemy had suffered almost as many casualties, and had been as badly dispersed, was but little comfort, for, despite these losses, the Russians were now within a few kilometres of Berlin. The French were in Hanover ; Silesia was in the hands of the Austrians. Frederick's cause seemed lost except in his own mind. He refused to give up, but he was

growing really humble. " I know that I have my faults," he confessed to Voltaire, " even great faults. I assure you that I don't treat myself gently, and that I pardon nothing when I talk to myself."

Frederick began to feel that he had been a complete failure. He had given up the life of a scholar to become a world conqueror, and he had succeeded in becoming neither. " You ask me for some verses," he complained to Voltaire. " It is as though an ocean asked a river for water. . . . I am a dilettante in everything. . . . I have never attained perfection in your art."

> De l'art de César et du votre
> J'étais trop amoureux dans ma jeune saison,
> Mais je vois au flambeau qu'allume ma raison
> Que j'ai mal reussi dans l'un comme dans l'autre.

He was, none the less, never too weary or too depressed to write poetry. " I write only to divert my mind," and he was sometimes afraid that if the war continued much longer there would be " nothing left of him but a mania for writing verse." He was in wretched health ; the nervous intestinal trouble, which recurred so frequently when he was under a strain, became very bad. He tried to cure it " by dieting and by patience," but it seemed sometimes as though " nature demanded of him a tribute of two and a half per cent." For almost five years " he denied himself the evening meal," as too much food was " incompatible with his trade," and at noon he " drank only a cup of chocolate." Physically he had become an old man.

" If you saw me now you would hardly recognise me," he wrote sadly to Voltaire. " I am old, broken, grey-haired, wrinkled. I am losing my teeth and my

gaiety." There had been practically no gradual, mellow processes in his maturity. Just as Katte's death, years before, had changed him, suddenly, from a boy into a man, he now skipped middle age. Before the war he was a young man ; now, five years later, he was old in spirit and in body. But his mind was not old, not feeble ; except in so far as he lost his capacity for enthusiasm his mind was never old.

He resolved on the reconquest of Silesia. He drafted old men and young boys into his army, and again increased his troops to about 100,000. He attacked the Austrians at the town of Liegnitz, near Breslau, where he was victorious. Silesia was reconquered.

In the meantime, a small Russian contingent of about 1,200 men had actually descended upon Berlin. They remained for about two weeks, helping themselves to souvenirs from Frederick's various palaces and enjoying themselves generally. When it was rumoured that Frederick and his army were returning from Silesia, the Russians gladly accepted 2,000,000 thaler from the City Fathers, and departed hastily. Everyone was afraid of Frederick by this time.

The Russians' visit had been a great shock to Court society in Berlin, where amusement and pleasures had continued as though a war had not been going on. Count Lehndorff, a leader of Berlin society, during the war kept a careful diary of the events at Court. A month after the death of the Dowager Queen, Sophie Dorothea, in June 1757, he is shocked to observe that " one is gay again at Court. Most of the people concerned would already have forgotten the deceased were they not forced to wear mourning for her."

When Frederick arrived in Brandenburg, the

Russian visitors had already joined their main army at Torgau, near Leipzig, where he attacked them and won a complete victory. This was not very difficult, as they were poorly organised, and Frederick derived no satisfaction from this success. He could not forget that the " Russian barbarians " had been in Berlin. He wanted revenge, and blamed Augustus of Saxony and Poland for this Russian incursion. He therefore gave orders that Augustus's castle, Hubertusberg, in Saxony, was to be looted. After this had been done thoroughly, Frederick went to Leipzig for the winter, where he " caused all the professors of the University to pass before him in review." He could no longer think even of the academic world of learning without using the language of a soldier.

In 1761 the campaign began very late. By October he had again lost southern Silesia to the Austrians. Another detachment of his army had lost Kolberg, in Pomerania, to the Russians. Pitt, Frederick's great friend in England, was replaced by Lord Bute under George III, and England refused further help to Prussia. France had been defeated by England on the American continent, and England's interest in a European war had therefore waned. She had become a world power, and needed Prussia no longer. Frederick made one last attempt to win back England's support. Necessity had made him a good diplomat, and he wrote to Pitt, just before his resignation : " Sir, I have just received a message from my Minister in London which causes me to surmise that there has been some mistake, and I therefore consider it advisable to communicate with you directly. . . . I have recalled the consistent attitude of Great Britain toward her allies,

and I find no time in history when she did not meet her obligations. . . . The choice lies with the King of England. He has two alternatives : either he will consider only the interests of his own country in the coming peace negotiations, and disregard his ally ; or, if he remembers his obligations, his word of honour, and his glory, he will combine the welfare of his ally with his own interests. If he choose the first alternative, I shall remember with no less gratitude that the English nation has stood by me in the most unselfish manner during the war."

Despite Frederick's efforts, England remained firm. There was no one else to whom he could appeal for help. There seemed nothing for him to do but to admit his failure, but still he persisted. He preferred to suffer such a complete defeat that nothing was left of Prussia, rather than to take the initiative toward an inglorious peace.

Then suddenly, out of a clear sky, his luck changed. Dame Fortune, whom he had so consistently maligned, came to his rescue. Elisabeth of Russia died in January 1762. To his Minister in London Frederick wrote, " *Morte la bestia.*" He rejoiced. Peter, her successor, hastened to make peace with Frederick. The Russian troops were withdrawn from East Prussia, and " this breakdown of the Russian front " made it possible for Frederick to concentrate all of his forces in Silesia. Frederick wrote to Peter : " Were I a heathen I should erect a temple and altars for your Imperial Highness as a divine creature. You have given the world an example of virtue from which everyone, including kings and sovereigns, should learn much. . . . I wish I could express everything I feel about you in my

heart. I wish I could express to you my desire to show my gratitude." In response, Peter sent a Russian contingent to help Frederick in Silesia, and during the coming months Frederick slowly regained his provinces. The tide had turned in his favour.

When Peter was murdered in July, Catherine the Great immediately declared war on Frederick again. She sent General Tchernicheff orders to fight with the Austrians in Silesia against Frederick. With the help of 15,000 ducats and a diamond-studded dagger, Frederick persuaded Tchernicheff to remain with the Prussian army three days longer, and to be silent about Catherine's orders until these days had passed.

In the meantime, Daun, the Austrian general, not knowing about Tchernicheff's orders from Catherine, expected that the Russians would attack him, so he sent off half of his army to meet them. Frederick attacked the remaining Austrian contingent at Schweidnitz with his combined Russian and Prussian forces, and won a final victory. A few weeks later his brother Henry defeated the other Austrian contingent east of Schweidnitz. Silesia again belonged to the Prussians. A few days after this success, another Prussian detachment won a decisive victory over the French near Kassel, driving them across the Rhine. In the eleventh hour Frederick had conquered.

The peace was signed at Hubertusberg on February 15, 1763. Silesia was irrevocably his, but otherwise Frederick gained nothing tangible; he had won no new territory; nor did he receive reparations. His enemies claimed that his final victory was due to Empress Elisabeth's sudden death, but even the mightiest among them considered him their

equal on the thrones of Europe. They hated him as much as they feared him. Prussia had become a great power. He was considered the greatest general in Europe. His father would have been proud of him.

Everyone was afraid of him. His soldiers knew that it usually meant trouble when his white horse carried him amongst them, but still they loved him, partly for himself, as their hero, and partly because at that time King worship was a part of every Prussian's religion.

Frederick was no longer a striking figure as he sat on his white horse : he was shrunken and old-looking, almost ridiculous in his unkempt uniform, but his eyes were as keen as ever, and his officers did not like to see them flash in anger. But few could withstand his charm when they met him face to face. His cynicism was no longer a clever mask ; it had become the essence of his whole personality. He was cold, he was ruthless, he was always selfish, he was seldom well washed, but he was always witty, he always said the unexpected, the amusing thing. When he smiled he was still able to win even those who no longer believed in him. He had dragged his subjects through one of the worst wars in history ; as a human being he had lost almost everything ; but his charm, like something detached from his character, had remained unsullied and untouched. And even in his arrogance, his biting sarcasm, his despotic manner, there was something unspeakably, poignantly lonely : a pathetic, shrivelled little figure, riding back to Berlin, after the war, on his faithful white horse.

CHAPTER IX

# WORK AFTER THE WAR

## (1763–1778)

Frederick lived twenty-three lonely years after the Seven Years' War. His enemies said that he needed at least twenty-three years to undo the havoc he had created in Prussia during the first part of his reign. He himself believed that after the war " his military task was finished." He felt that " having sacrificed his youth to his father and his mature years to his country, he had now earned the right to plan his old age for himself." Again, as after the Silesian wars, he thought he wanted to spend at least " a part of his life in peace," but, despite his weariness and exhaustion, the impulse for incessant activity was stronger in him than any other instinct or desire. This impulse was even more insistent than it had been in his youth, when he still hoped vaguely for some human companionship to hold his interest, absorb at least some of his time. Then, above all, he still looked forward to the advent of Voltaire. Now he was hopelessly, irrevocably alone. He still had a circle of friends at Sans Souci, it is true. They dined with him and he made fun of them, but they meant little or nothing to him. D'Alembert, the French scientist, whom he had met in 1755 and urged to make Potsdam his permanent home, had not come.

More and more Frederick relied on work as his one

source of satisfaction. " I have infirmities and illnesses," he wrote to Voltaire, " and I cure myself with work and with patience." The reconstruction of Prussia after the war gave him more than enough work to do. It was fortunate for his country that his energy was always directed by his intelligence. He never fussed about idly, never worked aimlessly, just to keep busy. Immediately after the war he concentrated on Prussia's finances. " Finance," he wrote at this time, " is unfortunately at the basis of all private and political life." Frederick's currency depreciation and heavy war taxes had left Prussia practically free from war debt—after the Peace of Hubertusberg there were, in fact, 29,000,000 thaler in the Prussian treasury—but a period of inflation, expressed in rising prices, set in.

Despite the crying need of his subjects during this period, Frederick laid aside 14,000,000 thaler as a " war reserve." Three-quarters of a million were to be used as a " little reserve " to pay for the immediate mobilisation of his army in case of another war. Seven million were to be spent at once for new arms and fortifications, especially in Silesia. Five and a half million were to redeem the forced " War Loan " which had been carried by his subjects.

This left only about 2,000,000 thaler for the care of war invalids, to provide for war widows and orphans, to rebuild devastated areas. Nevertheless, Frederick took a part of this sum to begin his " New Palace " in Potsdam, an enormous residence which took six years to complete. He took the trouble to explain to Prussia at large that he was building this palace " to give work to the unemployed," but among his friends he

alluded to it frankly as a " fanfaronade " to his enemies. He wanted to show them that he was by no means ruined ; that he could afford to build himself a new home.

On the high round dome of the " New Palace " stand three female figures, gracefully supporting a crown. Tradition, through the mouth of every Potsdam guide, reports that these ladies represent Madame de Pompadour, Maria Theresa, and Catherine the Great, whom Frederick tried to punish by making them " uphold his crown for ever."

Frederick made plans at once to increase Prussia's income, but he was not as successful as he had hoped. He introduced elaborate import duties on all kinds of commodities, and took over Prussia's trade in tobacco and coffee as crown monopolies. France was the country where monopolies had flourished more successfully than anywhere else in Europe, so he invited Frenchmen to organise and administer these new Prussian monopolies. Practical as he was, he did not object to harbouring former enemies in his country as long as they made money for him, but he forgot that after seven years of war against France his people might feel differently about it. It was, in fact, considered patriotic by most loyal Prussians to thwart these French supervisors as much as possible ; goods were smuggled in on all occasions, and Frederick did not make as much money as he had hoped.

Less than four months after the war he began to stabilise the Prussian currency. He was fully aware of the economic crisis which would inevitably follow, but he preferred this to a prolonged period of inflation. The Prussian currency had been debased to about a

third of its real value. By the beginning of the new fiscal year—on June 1, 1763—he had withdrawn these debased coins from circulation. New currency was minted with three-quarters of their pre-war silver contents. The next fiscal year he minted coins with a normal silver content, and all paper money still in circulation was declared valueless. This process of deflation was a great hardship to everyone. People lost their paper money savings entirely, and their silver money was only worth its actual silver content. The small number of individuals who had amassed great fortunes during the war were the ones to complain most bitterly ; the more so that Frederick, secretive as usual, had given no warning of his stabilisation plans. Had they known that deflation was coming, shrewd business men could have spent their worthless money on real estate or foreign currencies.

One of the most spectacular business failures at this time was the collapse of Gotskowsky, a Berlin merchant, who was the Stinnes of the Seven Years' War. His greatest enterprise—a porcelain factory in Berlin, which he built after going to Saxony during the Prussian occupation and helping himself to the patents of the Meissen factory—was promptly taken over by Frederick after his failure. This factory has since been known as the " Royal Porcelain Factory of Berlin." Frederick was fast developing into an excellent business man.

He was not too busy at home, however, to keep a careful eye on international affairs. He observed with satisfaction a complication which was arising in Poland. Augustus and his son Charles had both died

in 1763, and everyone in Europe was interested in the Polish Succession. The Polish throne was not passed on automatically from father to son, each new monarch being elected by the nobility. A group of Polish nobles came to Berlin to offer the throne to Frederick's brother Henry. In the meantime, Catherine of Russia was seeking a throne for her favourite, Poniatowski, and Poland seemed like a gift of the gods to her. Frederick decided that it would be unwise to accept the Poles' invitation to Henry ; he knew that Catherine could be a dangerous enemy, so he supported her candidate instead, and Poniatowski became King of Poland.

Frederick and Catherine crystallised this co-operation in a Treaty which was signed in 1764 ; they promised each other mutual support in case of Polish disturbances. Such trouble occurred sooner than they had expected. Some of the Polish nobles did not like Poniatowski at all. In 1768 their dissatisfaction became articulate, and they openly rebelled against the new King. Catherine defended him by armed force ; a Russian detachment was sent to the south of Poland to suppress the rebels. The insurgent Poles were defeated, and fled to northern Turkey ; the Russians, who followed in pursuit, lost their heads and demolished several Turkish villages. The Sultan was incensed, and declared war on Russia. " You will be surprised to learn," Frederick wrote to Voltaire, " that there is a war on in Europe in which *I* am not taking part."

Frederick dutifully sent financial subsidies to his ally Catherine, but he was not at all happy about her success. He knew that after a decisive victory it would

be only too easy for her to end the Polish trouble by simply turning Poland into a Russian province. Frederick did not want her as an immediate neighbour.

Frederick knew that for once Maria Theresa would agree with him, for she too could not afford to have Catherine become so powerful, and he decided to make friends with her at last. Francis had died three years before, and his son, Joseph, had succeeded him as German Emperor. He had also become his mother's co-regent on the Austrian throne. Maria Theresa would have been lost without masculine guidance ; she never acknowledged even to herself that she was a far more able ruler than either her husband or her son. Such an unwomanly admission would have shocked her.

Frederick decided to win Joseph as a friend. They met in a town in Silesia, Frederick tactfully wearing an Austrian uniform in honour of the occasion. Some of his officers objected to this apparently humble attitude, but Frederick felt that after two successful wars against Austria he could well afford such an outward concession. The time had come when he needed Austria, and he made up his mind to charm Joseph, who, after all, had a great influence on his mother. Joseph's enthusiasm for Frederick knew no bounds. Frederick liked the youth in return, though he thought that, " unfortunately for himself, he is a young man who always takes the second step before the first." At any rate, their meeting was a success. Reconciliation between Prussia and Austria had been accomplished.

In the meantime, Frederick had sent his brother

Henry to Russia to discuss the Polish question with Catherine. None of the Great Powers were willing that any one of the others should have a controlling interest in Poland. For some time Frederick had been playing with the brilliant idea of simply dividing Poland between Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Poland was far too weak to offer any resistance at all. Catherine approved this plan at once, but Maria Theresa had qualms of conscience, which were finally put to sleep by Joseph and Count Kaunitz. She never really approved, however, and when all plans to divide Poland had been settled, and she was asked to sign the pact, she did so unwillingly, adding after her signature : " I sign because so many wise and great men want me to do it ; but, a long time after my death, the world will witness the results of an act which has gone against all precedent of what is accepted as sacred and just."

Frederick had no qualms of conscience. He had increased his territory and his population. Besides, he rejoiced in this successful feat in international diplomacy. He did not want to look ahead ; he never stopped to think that the division of Poland might cause his descendants endless trouble. He was not concerned with his successors, nor with Prussia's future ; he reigned by and for himself ; he was absorbed by the present, and had no interest in the coming generations.

After his international triumph, he again turned his undivided attention to Prussia and to his subjects. " My chief occupation," he wrote to Voltaire, " is to fight the ignorance and the prejudices in this country, which, by accident of birth, it is my duty to govern.

I must enlighten my people, cultivate their manners and morals, and make them as happy as human beings ever can be ; as happy as the means at my disposal permit me to make them."

For Frederick, his " people " were sharply divided into the classes to which they irrevocably belonged : the nobility, including his officers and the landholders ; the middle class, largely absorbed by trade, industry, and the professions ; the common people, the *vulgaire*, whom he considered " what nature had made them : wicked animals."

The Prussian nobles had never been money-earners ; the products of their estates furnished them a comfortable income from generation to generation. Frederick wanted them to continue this comfortable life, and to retain their monopoly of Prussia's food-supply. Most of the large estates had been so neglected during the war, and the owners so impoverished, that this was not easy. A few impoverished Pomeranian *Junkers* tried to sell their estates to the bourgeois business men in Berlin who had made fortunes during the war. Frederick, who always seemed to know everything that was going on, heard about these transactions, and was genuinely horrified. He strictly forbade the sale of an estate to any individual who was not of the nobility.

He wanted the bourgeoisie to remain in its place. He considered it their function to develop Prussia's trade and industry ; in other words, they were to earn the money on which Prussia could live. During the war, Frederick had been forced to reward the valour of a few bourgeois by granting them commissions in the army, but after the war he either reduced them

to non-commissioned officers at once, or permitted his noble officers to humiliate them in such a way at the officers' mess and elsewhere that they could bear it no longer, and resigned of their own accord.

To Frederick the common people were just the common people, especially if they happened to be Germans, whom he considered " a type of vegetable as compared with the French." The common people were none the less excellent material for his army, but they were not worth " being enlightened." He had a certain paternal interest in their physical welfare, and loved to remark on all occasions : " Everything *for* the people, nothing *by* the people."

His real attitude towards *le vulgaire* was one of the things he did not voice at large. He was sincerely shocked at the poor taste of a Prussian noblewoman who, after hearing the news of a particularly horrible battle, " thanked God that the nobility had been spared and only the common people were being killed." Frederick never showed the slightest consideration for his common soldiers during the war ; he did not hesitate to have them driven into battle at the point of a bayonet if he thought this necessary ; but he considered it poor taste to discuss this attitude as crudely as the lady had done.

His first thought after the war had been of the nobility. He travelled about Prussia to see their estates himself, to see what could be done to alleviate the shocking condition in which the war had left many of them ; the peasants whose families had tilled the fields for generations had been killed in the war, or, at best, had been absent for years. He organised a system whereby the peasants were to be sent from

estate to estate, working a few months on each, but in the end he gave up this plan. The Prussian peasants had been accustomed for so long to be attached to a specific *Junker* family that a new master, or several masters during one year, might have made them question the order of society they had accepted for so long. They might have thought of moving of their own accord. So he brought agricultural labour from Poland and Mecklenburg and Saxony to work on the Prussian estates. He realised that he and his nobles could only get good work out of these men if they were really satisfied ; and he promised to each " a house, a little garden, and enough pasture to keep two cows," if they left their homes and came to Prussia. He kept his promise, and the immigrants worked faithfully and hard to rebuild Prussia. Swamps were turned into fertile land ; dams were built to prevent rivers from overflowing. The large estates flourished once more, and the *Junker* class was saved from ruin.

Frederick was as much interested in trade and industry as he was in agriculture. This was his chief bond with the bourgeoisie. He had canals built to facilitate transportation of goods, and enlarged the port at Stettin. He subsidised manufacture, and tried in every way to promote trade. " The basis rule to follow in connection with all trade and manufacture," he wrote, " is to prevent money from flowing permanently out of the country ; an attempt should always be made to bring it back again into Prussia. The exodus of money can best be prevented by producing in Prussia all kinds of goods which were formerly imported. All imports are to be indicated by invoices which list commodities imported into

Prussia and sold here. From these lists it is easy to judge which factories can be enlarged and which should be readjusted to another type of production.

" The second way to prevent an undue exodus of money from the country is to purchase necessary foreign commodities at their original source, thus taking the trade in one's own hands instead of leaving it to foreign agents. This means that goods costing a thaler in Hamburg probably cost only a gulden if they are purchased directly from Spain. The resulting decrease in commodity prices would be a distinct gain, quite apart from the direct profit to domestic Prussian traders, for it implies also a relative loss to Hamburg and Dutch merchants.

" Manufacture, of course, results in large quantities of money within the country. Increased production could, however, be a source of even greater wealth, because of our propinquity to Poland and Russia, for these countries are in constant need of all commodities, and are therefore forced to maintain indirectly the industry of their neighbours. All these reasons must cause the ruler of Prussia to encourage manufacture and trade, whether through direct subsidies or through tax exemptions, so that they may be in a position for large-scale production and trade."

Frederick was better able to deal with every kind of practical problem than were specialists such as his Ministers, whom he needed only as clerks to carry out his ideas. He had become even more thorough and efficient an administrator than his father had been before him.

CHAPTER X

# THE END

## (1778–1786)

Frederick had believed his active military career over after the Seven Years' War, but in 1778 he again set forth at the head of his army. The Elector of Bavaria, Maximilian Joseph, had died the year before, without a son, but his relative, Charles Theodore, Elector of the Palatinate, was unquestionably his rightful heir. Austria, on the other hand, had been looking forward to Maximilian's death as an opportunity to annex the southern part of Bavaria, and an Austrian army was sent there at once. Charles Theodore was so impressed and intimidated by this sudden appearance of Maria Theresa's troops that he was ready to share Bavaria with her. Besides, he did not really care whether Bavaria was divided or not. He was chiefly concerned with the care of a large number of illegitimate children, whom he was unable to support properly and who were making his life a burden. In return for his willingness to share Bavaria with Austria, Joseph promised Charles Theodore that he would provide for all these children out of the Austrian treasury.

Charles Theodore was about to sign this agreement when a message arrived from Frederick reminding him of his inviolable rights as the head of a German Electorate State, and pointing out that, in the end, he could provide for his children even better if he kept Bavaria completely in his own hands. He advised

Charles Theodore to protest against the Austrian invasion, and promised him Prussia's support.

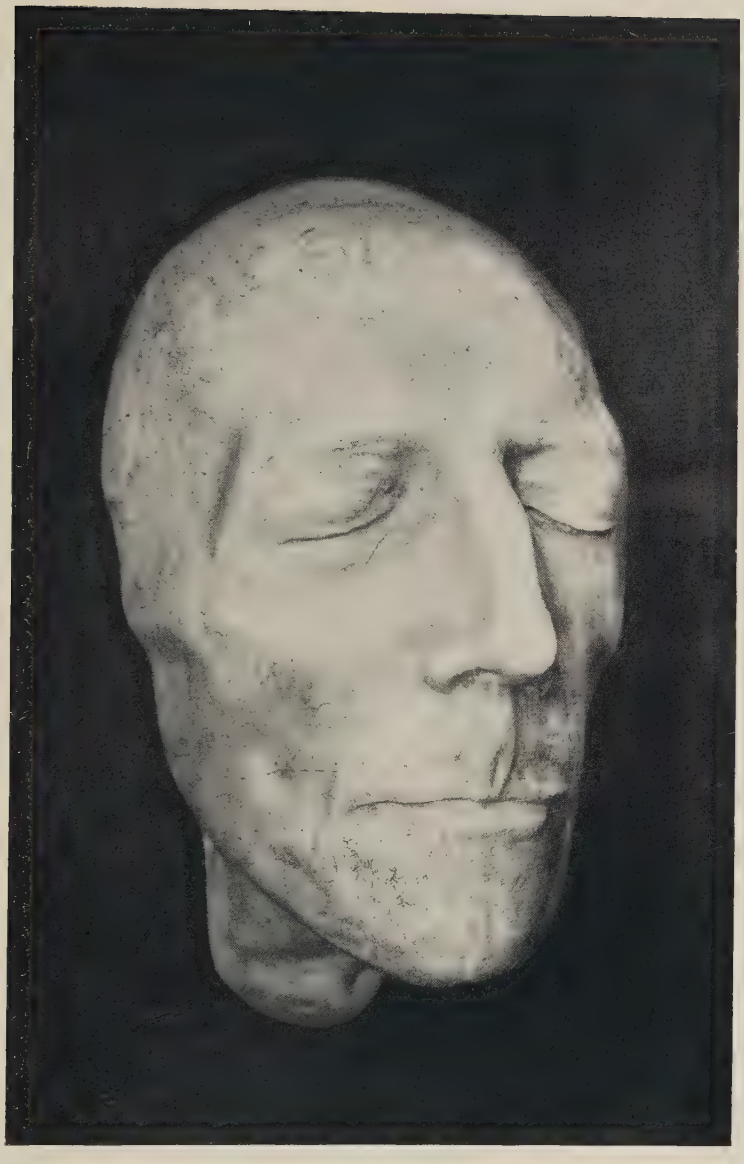
Frederick had no real feeling of solidarity with the other German States—his interest in the Empire began and ended with Prussia—but he refused to see Maria Theresa pocket half of Bavaria without at least making an effort to stop her. Joseph, who, since their meeting, had cherished his friendship with Frederick, hoped that something could be done to avert trouble, but no friendship ever influenced Frederick when politics were concerned.

Austria refused to withdraw her troops, and Frederick, therefore, assembled his forces to come to the rescue of Charles Theodore. The war only lasted a year, but Austria was defeated, and had to be satisfied with a very small strip of land in southern Bavaria. Maria Theresa died the next year, still thinking of this last war with Frederick—the struggle of a lifetime was over between them.

Frederick, who never gave much thought to the future, did not realise to what an extent this Bavarian campaign influenced Prussia's entire history : for the first time Prussia, as the most powerful country in north Germany, had risen to defend the rights of another Electorate State against Austria. Many of the Electors believed that Frederick was interested in their welfare. This they wanted to believe, because they wanted to cling to Prussia as their protector against Austria. This faith finally resulted in the " Deutscher Fürstenbund," the first union of North German States, which was formed in 1785. During Frederick's lifetime, therefore, Prussia had not only become a great European Power ; no, more than that ; this " Fürstenbund " was the beginning of Prussia's influence among the German

States themselves, and was the first step towards the new German Empire, which was finally established in 1871.

His success in this last war gave Frederick no real satisfaction. Actually Prussia had never meant anything to him but an outlet for his personal energy, for his incessant need to find work. His achievements as a soldier and a statesman had given him no joy, no peace in his old age. He was as restless as ever ; it no longer amused him to exert his charm, and he had become a thoroughly discontented old man, who was usually irritable and querulous. His growing ill-temper made life very uncomfortable for his servants and his Ministers ; for himself it meant a tragedy. He realised fully how he had deteriorated as a human being. To the end he lived consciously, and was as critical of himself as he always had been. His self-analysis in his old age, when it was too late to change his nature, embittered the last years of his life. " Clever observers of human nature," he wrote to Voltaire, " have often noticed that most military men become querulous in their old age, and that scholars do not deteriorate as rapidly as they grow old. The great Condé, Marlborough, and Prince Eugen were forced to feel their minds growing senile before their bodies. I shall perhaps share their fate, without having had the comfort of a mentality as great as theirs." As a matter of fact, Frederick's mind never weakened, but remained keen to the end. His disposition suffered all the more ; he felt that he had misspent his years, and he still blamed his unhappy and repressed childhood for the insatiable desire for power which now left his life completely empty. " Impressions which one receives in childhood," he sadly realised, " cannot



THE DEATH MASK

be erased from the soul." He cursed the day on which his impulse to conquer the world had prompted him to desert his literary and artistic interests. " I assure you," he wrote to his secretary, de Catt, " had I really been the master of my fate, neither the glory of a throne, nor the pride of commanding armies, nor a taste for shallow diversions, would have seduced my interests away from the arts." He began to attribute everything—his unhappiness, his loneliness, the failure of his friendships—to the fact that he was born to be a King. Had he been born without royal blood he would at least have been free, and unsuspicious that his friends liked him chiefly because he was a King. It was lonelier, somehow, to be alone as a King, who was known all over the world, who had no real privacy, than to have been alone as a private individual, as a writer . . . for he felt that he might have been a great writer had he not been forced into kingship.

" Your vocation as a hero," Voltaire wrote to him once, " and your position as a King, have not made your heart very sensitive ; this is too bad, for your heart was made to be human, and without your heroism and your throne you would have been the most charming man in society."

Frederick worked incessantly until the day before he died. He had time to write poetry and to play his flute as much as he chose, but his hands were twisted with gout and he had lost so many teeth that he could no longer blow properly into his *principessa.* His leisure had come too late. He had to be satisfied by being read to, instead of doing something himself, and he resented a passive rôle as much as ever.

Frederick had no real friends except his dogs, who

were his constant companions, sleeping in his bedroom and walking with him wherever he went. Occasionally travellers stopped at Potsdam to see the famous Frederick, but none of them came as friends to cheer him in his old age. His brother Henry came to Sans Souci rarely; he preferred his friends at Rheinbergs to the morose King. Frederick was almost pathetically grateful for his rare visits. " Thank you again," he wrote to Henry once, " for the pleasure you gave me by coming here. I should like to have given you more entertainment, but one must not seek diversion when one visits an old man."

Count Louis Philippe de Ségur, who saw Frederick in 1785, a year before his death, writes : " I looked at him with particular interest—large as far as his genius was concerned, small in stature, shrunken and bent from the weight of his fame and his work of years. A strange and yet impressive picture : his old coat, worn out like his body, his high boots coming up over his knees, and his waistcoat covered with tobacco stains. The fire of his eyes showed that his mind had not aged. For, though his bearing was that of an invalid, one felt, none the less, that he could still fight like a young hero."

He tried to find some human interest in his numerous nephews and nieces, but they did not find him very satisfactory, and the one youth with whom he began to form a real friendship—his brother's son—died very suddenly at the age of twenty. " There is nothing in life," he wrote after the boy's death, " but to see those buried whom one loves."

He hated life and the world at large, and was so full of bitterness that there was no room for gentleness

in his soul. " No one asks us whether we wish to be born into this world. We are put here. God knows why. We suffer in the spirit and in the flesh, and then we die without knowing why we were forced to go through life, why we must bear so much cruelty and then sink into oblivion still resenting the silly and futile rôle we have been obliged to play on this earth."

He thought more and more about death as his one salvation. " The sweetest day of life is the one on which one leaves it for ever," he wrote. " I consider that I have served my term. My time is passed, and I shall die soon."

His last wish was to be buried quietly, without pomp, in the plot of ground near Sans Souci which he had chosen so long ago. " I lived as a philosopher," he wrote, " and I wish to be buried as such, without pomp or ceremony. Should I die in Potsdam or Berlin, I do not wish to be exposed to the idle curiosity of my people. I wish to be buried at midnight of the third day after my death. I wish to be carried to ' Sans Souci ' by the light of a lantern, no one following but the men who carry my coffin, and to be quietly buried in the garden of ' Sans Souci.' "

In September 1785 the end seemed near. Frederick had a stroke, and his physicians did not think he would outlive the day, but once more he surprised them and lived for almost another year longer. During this time he continued to work as though he had never been ill, seeing his secretaries every day and planning each detail of their work for them.

The end came the following year, early in the morning of August 17, when Frederick passed away in the arms of his valet—not his beloved Fredersdorf, however, for he had died several years

before. " *La montagne est passée*," were his last words ; " *nous irons mieux*." The clock in the music-room, next to the room in which he died, still points to twenty minutes past two. The guides who show Sans Souci to visitors say that it stopped when Frederick died ; that it has never been wound up since.

Everyone in Prussia felt that a great period in her history was over, but few had any personal regrets. He died as he had been born, unloved.

His last wish was not to be fulfilled, for his successor, his nephew, the second Frederick William, did not think it proper that a man whom all the world called " the Great " should be buried quietly. The new King of Prussia, himself quite undistinguished, wanted to shine in his predecessor's reflected glory. Frederick William arranged a funeral which all Europe should discuss with awe. Frederick's coffin was carried in state from Sans Souci, through the park and the crowded streets of Potsdam. Hundreds of people followed the cortège : Ambassadors from every country on the Continent, Frederick's officers in gala uniform, his Ministers in deepest mourning. Carriage after carriage followed ; the entire Court had come to Potsdam for the first and last time. His coffin was closed by soldiers of his favourite regiment.

The coffin was taken to the Garnison Kirche, the military church in Potsdam. Only one other Hohenzollern had been buried there before him—his father. Even in death Frederick could not free himself from Frederick William : alone in a small vault, he and his father were placed side by side, irrevocably. To this day they lie there alone together ; Frederick's fate pursued him to the end.

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